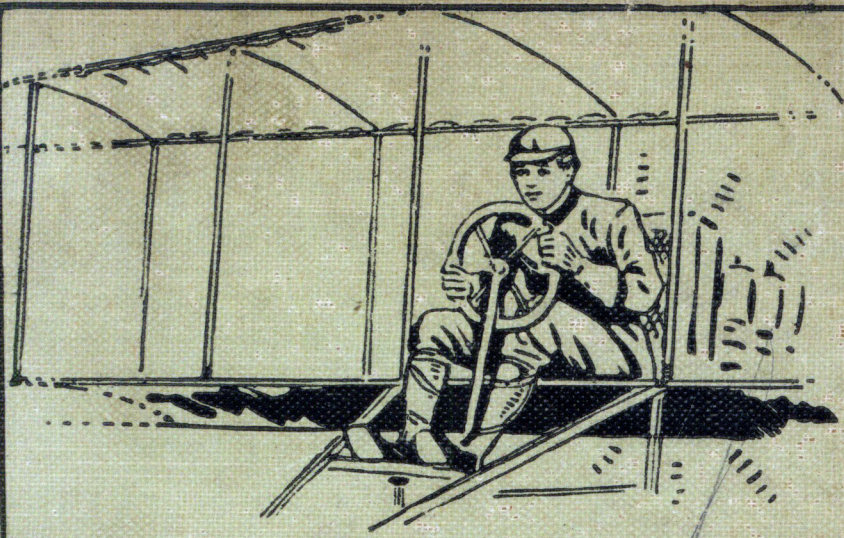

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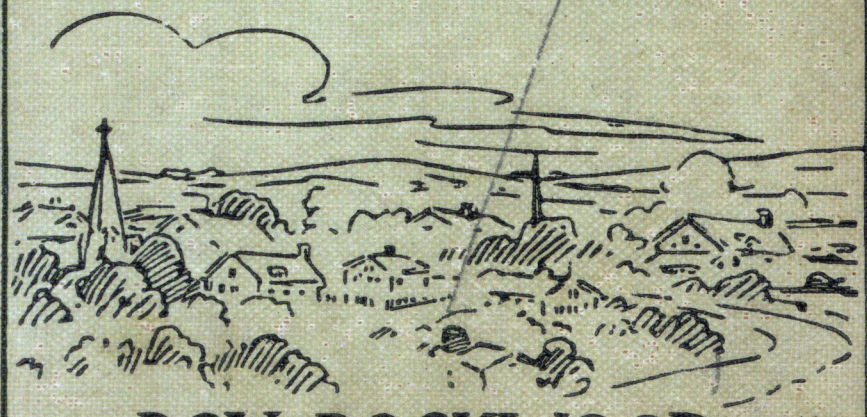

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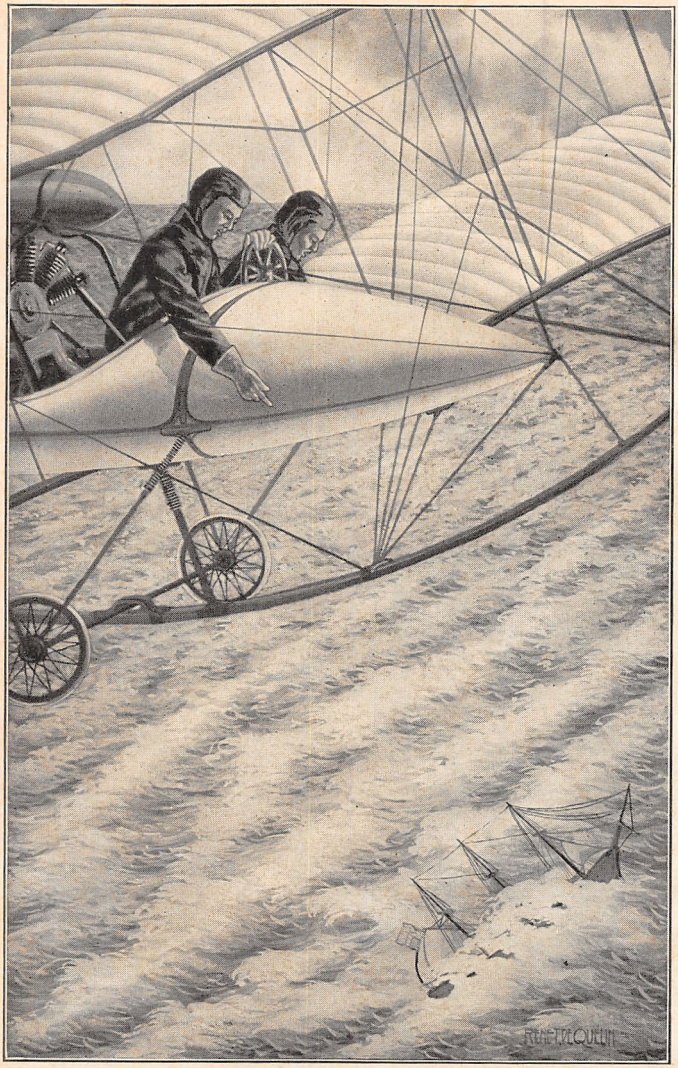

THE YOUNG PILOT LESSENED THE SPEED OF THE ARIEL.

Dave Dashaway, Air Champion

Or

Wizard Work in the Clouds

BY

ROY ROCKWOOD

AUTHOR OF "DAVE DASHAWAY, THE YOUNG AVIATOR," "THE SPEEDWELL BOYS SERIES," "THE GREAT MARVEL SERIES," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

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DAVE DASHAWAY, AIR CHAMPION
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DAVE DASHAWAY, AIR CHAMPION

CHAPTER I

AT THE HANGARS

"DAVE, here is something that will surely interest you."

As he spoke, Hiram Dobbs held up a newspaper to the view of his companion, and Dave Dashaway caught sight of the prominent head line: "Grand International Aviation Contest."

The two friends were amid an environment strongly suggestive of airships and their doings. They were sitting under a tree near the hangar where Dave's various aircraft and equipments were stored. This was Dave's home, for the time being. Here, for over a month he had slept, ate and trained for just such an event as the one which his chum had brought to his attention.

There was nothing about Dave's present appearance to indicate that he was an expert in aviation except a medal modestly showing beyond the lapel of his coat. It might, however, have been a source of surprise to the average person to read the inscription on the medal, certifying to Dave's

championship in a feat that had startled the aviation world.

Hiram proudly wore a pin bearing the initials: "N. A. A." (National Aero Association) showing a distinction beyond the ordinary for a boy of his age, and showing, too, that when he spoke of aviation it was not as a novice.

"Dave, you ought to go in for that," he added.

"Yes, it looks attractive," agreed the young aviator after a swift glance over the item under discussion.

"Ten thousand dollars—think of it!" exclaimed the interested Hiram.

"It's a big lot of money," responded Dave, slowly.

"And a big heap of work to win it, I suppose you would say," supplemented Hiram. "Well, you never were afraid of work, and as to the chances—say, a fellow who has done what you've just done—why, it'll be mere child's play!"

Dave Dashaway smiled at the ardor of his companion. He was thinking, though, and impressed by the present situation. All things pertaining to aviation had a great attraction for Dave. His dreams, his practical efforts, all his ambitions lay in the direction of supremacy as an air pilot.

"I have been resting for a spell, as you might call it, Hiram," he said finally, "and hadn't of late,

thought much of business. After that last dash of ours, you know, Mr. Brackett thought we had better let the season run out and prepare for something out of the ordinary next year."

"This has come along all right; hasn't it?" challenged Hiram, pointing at the item. "And the biggest kind of a thing, too. 'Ten thousand dollars to the aviator scoring most in all events.' Besides that, prizes for points in plain sailing, altitude and fancy stunts. It's your class, Dave, it's near here and you were never in better working trim in your life."

"Why, Hiram," spoke Dave, "you seem to have quite set your heart upon it."

"Indeed I have!" vociferated the impetuous Hiram. "Think I'm going to sit around and keep mum, and hear a lot of would-be-airmen brag? Not much! They boast about a heap of records I know they never made. They were talking about this very prize offer last night. I took a good deal of pride in telling them about some of the things you've done. They knew about most of them, though. They looked glum when I hinted that you were going in for a try."

"You shouldn't have done that," said Dave, quickly.

"Shouldn't—why not?"

"Because in this line the wise man keeps his bus-

iness to himself. Airmen, generally, are a jealous lot. Some of them, as we have reason to know, are untrustworthy."

"I never thought of that," replied Hiram, his face growing serious. "You're right! It wouldn't be the first time some schemers got after you, and tried to block you. That's so! All the same, with that new *Ariel,* biplane, made specially for you, who can beat you? Why, Dave, your little trailer, the *Scout,* alone has half a dozen speed points ahead of the average machine on the field here. Those new release gears are just dandy, and there isn't a craft on the list that has such an engine as the *Ariel,* let alone the fuselage angle rods and the tubular framework."

"I declare, Hiram," laughed Dave, "you've been posting up on scientific details lately; haven't you?"

"I've tried to get it pat, yes, I'll admit," assented Hiram proudly. "Then again, I've had a motive in view. You see, I've been thinking up a grand scheme—"

Hiram came to a sudden stop, looked embarrassed, and there was a faint flush on his face. It was with a somewhat sheepish expression in his eyes that he glanced at his companion.

"I know what you're hinting at," observed Dave shrewdly. "I suspected you were up to something when I saw you working over those little can-

vas bags. What's the mystery, Hiram? Going to tell, this time?"

"I'm not," dissented the young airman's assistant staunchly. "You'd just laugh and say it was another of my grand schemes. All right! Those bags mean something—provided you go into this new contest. Honest, Dave," went on Hiram with impressive earnestness, "I can put you onto a wrinkle in aeronautics that is new enough, and strong enough, to carry the day any time—oh, bother!"

Whatever scheme the young lad had in his mind, its disclosure was prevented at that moment by the arrival of an intruder. A man of about thirty, wearing a monocle, mincing in his steps and looking the typical English "dandy" to perfection, approached the bench where the two friends sat.

"It's Lieutenant Montrose Mortimer," remarked Dave with a faint smile.

"Lieutenant nothing!" declared Hiram forcibly. "He's no more a British army officer than I am."

"Ah, Mr. Dashaway," spoke the newcomer, bowing, "I hope you've thought over my proposition."

"Why, yes, Lieutenant," replied Dave, "I have done so."

"And have arrived at a decision?" questioned the other with marked eagerness.

"Well, no, not exactly," answered Dave promptly. "You see, Lieutenant Mortimer, I am not a free agent in aviation matters. In fact, you might say I am under contract indefinitely to Mr. Brackett, who has financed me in the past. I should have to refer your offer to him, you see."

"When will he be here?" asked the man, evidently very much disappointed.

"He may be here within a week."

"I sincerely trust you will prevail on him to accept my offer," spoke the pretended army man. "I shall feel that my duty to the admiralty and war office has been remiss if I fail to secure your valuable services. I am aware of your opposition to leaving your native country. I also appreciate your wish to remain neutral in regard to any actual warfare. That can be arranged. What we ask of you is to act as an instructor. Please think it over," and he turned aside.

"Now, then," broke out Hiram promptly as the lieutenant sauntered away, "what is that fellow really after, Dave?"

"Why, Hiram, according to his own story he is a representative from the aviation department of the British war office. He has made a very creditable showing—and he offers me all expenses paid abroad, where he says a yearly contract of several thousand dollars will be offered."

"I don't like him. Why, say, he reminds me of one of the funny cartoons that new tramp friend of yours drew for us last evening."

"Hello!" exclaimed Dave, glancing hastily at his watch and then at the hangar. "He's some sleeper; isn't he, that tramp?"

The young airman referred to a new character who had incidentally come across their path the day previous. He was a tramp, a little above the average, but still frowsy, hungry and penniless. His humor had made an impression on the boys. They had fed him and he had asked for work to repay them. He was sober, and he looked honest. Dave had consented to his sleeping in the hangar.

"I guess it's the first comfortable bed the poor fellow has had for a long time," explained Hiram. "Say, Dave, he must have been a good artist once, to draw those faces as cleverly as he did last evening."

"Yes, he certainly has a sort of genius about him," began Dave, when there was a sudden and startling interruption.

From Dave's hangar there came a dull explosion. Both of the young aviators made a rush in its direction, wondering what accident had happened.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAMP ARTIST

"SOMEBODY is trying to blow us up again!" shouted Hiram, in a great state of excitement.

That word "again" meant just what the young airman apprentice intended that it should. As we have already said, the two chums were no novices in the strange line of business activity they had taken up to earn a living. They had not only shared triumphs and gains, but many a peril besides. There had instantly come to Hiram's mind, and to that of Dave Dashaway as well, on the present occasion a memory of past deeds of jealousy, hatred and cunning on the part of unprincipled rivals, where fire and powder were used in destructive and dangerous work.

There had been no lights in the hangar since the night before, its only occupant that the boys knew of was the tramp-artist they had accommodated. As both noticed a little puff of smoke shoot out through a ventilating pipe in the roof of the struc-

ture, they were sure that something had blown up, or had been blown up.

Hiram and Dave were greatly anxious. Inside that hangar were two machines valued as an expert horseman would cherish his pet steeds, or a crack motorist his favorite automobile. Particularly was Dave's latest acquisition, the *Ariel,* to which Hiram had referred so proudly, a possession that the young birdman treasured. The active fear that this might have sustained some damage spurred him to hasten on and see what had happened.

It was by no easy or accidental route that Dave Dashaway had reached his present position as an aviator. It had been no path of roses for him. In the first book of this series, entitled "Dave Dashaway, The Young Aviator," his struggles and initial triumphs have been depicted. He found a good friend in one Robert King, a man of some means, and by hard study and practice Dave won his laurels as a professional.

In the second volume, called "Dave Dashaway And His Hydroplane," the further progress of the ambitious young airman is recited. His father had been a scientist and balloonist. The cooperation of one of his old associates proved a wonderful aid to Dave, and he went through some stirring experiences both up in the air and on the water.

"Dave Dashaway And His Giant Airship," was

the medium for telling of Dave's breaking of many aviation records. In that book the flight of the dirigible *Albatross,* involved a fascinating series of discoveries and adventures. The last preceding book of the series, "Dave Dashaway Around The World," describes a daring race for a rich prize, which Dave, with the willing aid of his young friends, won, honorably defeating all competitors.

Hiram Dobbs, a young aero enthusiast, Dave had picked up accidentally. It proved to be a lucky "find." Crude, impetuous though he might be, Hiram was not only a loyal friend, but developed great efficiency as a sort of understudy of the chum and employer whom he looked up to as the ideal champion of the aviation world.

As the young airman had put it, he and his good-natured and well-intentioned assistant were now "taking a rest." They had come to Midlothian, a practice field of a Mississippi river city, to be near several points where exhibition aviation features were in progress. Mr. Brackett had been the mainstay, financially, of Dave all through his professional career. It was true that the young aviator had essentially won his own way and had helped to make famous the output of the Interstate Aero Company, of which Mr. Brackett was practically the owner. Still, Dave felt that all he had gained had been through the encouragement and assistance

of the manufacturer. As a matter of fact, Dave deferred greatly to the opinion and direction of this valuable friend. He had been expecting his arrival daily at the Midlothian grounds, to talk over the situation and prospects for future work.

"Whew!" ejaculated Hiram, as he pulled open the door of the hangar, and rushed in. "Fire!"

"No, only smoke," corrected Dave—"and not much of that, lucky for us!"

"I say!" cried his companion in an exasperated tone as he went spinning off his feet. Contact with an indistinct, wildly-rushing human form had caused this. There had been a smoky haze inside the hangar that had hid the aroused sleeper from clear view. Now, however, the tramp was plainly visible. He looked startled and scared and he was nursing the fingers of his left hand in the palm of the other.

"What's happened—are you hurt?" inquired Dave.

"Whew! Well—why, oh, it's only a little burn, but—catch the rascal!"

As the speaker finished the rapidly shouted sentence he dashed towards the fence. Upon this the rear of the hangar backed. The tramp was quick, and as nimble as a monkey as he ran at the fourteen-foot barrier. One of its slanting supports carried him within reach of the bracing stringer. He lifted himself to this. From the ground the aeroplane

boys could see him bobbing his head about among the barbed wire runners, strung along on top of the fence, as if to catch a view of a vacant field beyond.

The tramp yelled out some disjointed words, and shook his fist angrily, as if after a scurrying fugitive. Then he slid down to the ground and faced Dave and Hiram, panting and excited.

"He made off—he got away!" the tramp ejaculated. "Too bad! I'm so big I couldn't get through that window."

"What window?" inquired Hiram.

"Cut in the fence that makes the rear of the hangar," was explained. "Come in. Let me show you."

Dave cast a hurried glance about the interior of the hangar as he entered it. Except that the little door which protected the rear window opening was out of place, everything seemed in order. Their tramp friend, however, had stooped over near the *Ariel*.

"Look here," he said, and the boys, crowding nearer to him, noticed that he held in his hand the crisped, blackened end of what resembled a fuse.

"Where does it lead to?" asked the startled Hiram.

Very gingerly the tramp ran eye and hand along the sinister-looking fuse. He seemed to locate its end as he reached under a corner of the airplane.

"Better get it outside," he suggested, and the boys saw that he had unearthed a round box-like object resembling a dry electric battery. The fuse ran to its center. The tramp carried it outside, set it down in the grass at a safe distance from the hangar, and observed:

"Better soak it in a pail of water before you handle it much. Those things are dangerous; very much so! If I don't mistake, you'll find it's dynamite."

"Then some one's up to a mean trick again!" cried the excitable Hiram, unable to repress himself. "Dave, you're not going to stand this; are you?"

"Why, Hiram," responded Dave quietly, "we don't yet know our bearings. Maybe it's a joke"

"Joke! Joke!" fairly yelled Hiram. "Yes, the same kind of a joke as that fellow Vernon played on us when he stole the *Comet* at the Washington aero meet. Or like that partner of his, who dropped a steel hook on the biplane purposely to wreck us."

Hiram had named the enemy the boys, according to past experience, had most to fear. Dave, however, was not wont to jump at hasty conclusions. He did not do so in the present instance. He put aside unproven suspicion for the time being.

"We had better make an investigation, and find

out all we can," Dave suggested. "You said your name was Borden, I believe?" he observed to the tramp.

"That's it—Roving Borden, they call me. I was Henry, in my respectable days."

"Very good, Mr. Borden, now please tell us what you know of this affair," Dave requested.

"I'm a pretty sound sleeper," narrated the tramp, "especially in such a famous bunk as you kindly gave me. I'd slept so long, though, that I fancy I was more easily awakened than usual. What I saw was done quickly. Some one must have forced in that shutter yonder. He had just put that thing we discovered under the edge of the balloon. The end of the fuse was spluttering as I woke up. I saw the fellow bolt through the window. Then I sprang up and grabbed the fuse. As I snapped it in two, it sort of exploded. See where it burned me?" and the speaker showed his blackened fingers.

"Lucky for us you were on hand!" broke in Hiram.

"I believe this to be the work of an enemy," spoke Dave, rather solemnly, after a moment's deliberation. "Did you have a good look at the fellow you saw go through the window, Mr. Borden?"

"I should say I did!" exclaimed the tramp. "When a fellow gets waked up suddenly and

startled, like I was, everything hits his brain as if it were a photograph camera. Say," and the speaker half closed his eyes, "I can see that rascal just as plain as day now. By the way, too, if I'm not mistaken I saw the very same individual hanging around the outside of the grounds when I sneaked in last night."

"Dave, I call this serious!" cried Hiram, aroused and indignant. "It's a queer thing if we can't have protection from the cowards who steal in on us when we're not watching, and try to wreck our aircraft! I'll wager the stuff in that canister would blow a small mountain to pieces!"

"Guess I'd have gone up, too, if it was that bad," remarked the tramp with a shiver.

Dave went to the window and examined it. The edges of the solid board shutter showed the marks of some chisel, or other tool, used to pry it open. Then the chums went outside. On the way Dave caught up a bundle of waste used in removing oil and grime from the machinery of the air crafts, and a newspaper.

The others watched him in silence as he carefully wound up what was left of the fuse, and placed it and the canister, to which it was attached, in the waste then, wrapping all in the newspaper, he said to Hiram:

"I'm going down to the manager's office."

"Going to find out if that's a real explosive; aren't you?" inquired Hiram.

"Yes, that's my purpose. If we find that it is, we can make up our minds that the people we have had trouble with before are still on our trail. I fancied we'd beaten them off so many times they had now gotten sick of such doings."

"Oh, if it's Vernon, or any of his crowd, they're the kind that will keep on pestering us to the last," declared Hiram. "Be back soon, Dave. I'm all rattled, and anxious."

The young birdman proceeded on his way. Hiram turned to the tramp, who had manifested a decided interest in all that had taken place.

"We didn't wake you up when we went down to the restaurant for breakfast," said Hiram. "You were sleeping so soundly it seemed a pity to disturb you."

"You're very good, both of you, to think of an old derelict like me," was the reply, given with feeling.

"Why, you've done us a big turn," responded Hiram, "so I guess you've squared things. I brought some eatables up from the café, and if you're hungry——"

"Say, friend," interrupted Borden in a serio-comic way—"I'm *always* hungry!"

"Then start with what there is," directed Hiram,

always glad to make others comfortable, as he spread the food out upon the bench near by. He watched their guest devour the viands with a relish that made him almost wish for a second breakfast himself. The tramp bolted the last morsel, and breathed a sigh of genuine content.

"That fills a mighty hollow spot," he observed. "Say, about the fellow that tried to blow you up here—got a piece of chalk?"

"Why, no," answered Hiram, noting that the speaker was viewing the smooth side of the hangar as might an artist a blank canvas. "I suppose you want to draw something," guessed Hiram, recalling the artistic efforts of the evening previous.

"That's it," assented Borden. "It might sort of satisfy your curiosity, and maybe give you a hint, if I can furnish you with an idea of how that blowing-up rascal looked."

"Why, that's a great idea!" cried Hiram. "Do it!"

"I want to get at it while the picture of the fellow is fresh in my mind," went on Borden. "Here's the very thing," and he picked up the paper that had held the morning lunch. "If I only had a black crayon now, instead of my fine pencil——"

"I'm pretty sure there's a carpenter's pencil in our tool box," suggested Hiram.

"Good! Get it, and a few brads, or tacks. Just

the thing," he added, as Hiram, after a search in the hangar, brought out the articles named.

Borden proceeded to attach the sheet of manilla paper to the side of the hanger. He smoothed its surface with his hand, rubbed the broad end of the big pencil to a point on a brick he discovered, and rolled up one ragged sleeve with a certain affected, artistic twirl that set Hiram laughing.

"That's all right," nodded the tramp indulgently. "I don't look much like a cartoonist, but all the same I once traveled as a lightning caricaturist. Heads are my specialty, and here goes for the fellow who came so near to blowing out the lights for a budding genius!"

Hiram watched eagerly, from that moment, for the space of a quarter of an hour. The faces Borden had quickly and crudely drawn on some cards, to amuse Dave and himself, and show off his accomplishments, the evening previous, had awakened the interest and admiration of the two lads. Now, however, Borden began to create, line by line, and curve by curve, as perfect a human face as Hiram had even seen done by an expert crayon artist.

"That's him," announced the artist, with a last touch of the pencil, and drawing back from the impromptu easel with a satisfied air.

He viewed his clever handiwork with a critical but gratified eye.

"Yes, it's him," went on Borden. "Thin, peaked chin, one wall eye. There you are! Just as good as if you'd got his picture from the rogues' gallery—where he belongs, if I don't miss my guess."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed his audience of one, in so decidedly a disappointed way, that the amateur artist knit his brows, and looked hurt.

CHAPTER III

"TARGET PRACTICE"

"WHY, I say!" exclaimed the tramp with a wondering stare at Hiram, "you don't seem glad at all."

"It isn't him, you see," responded Hiram dubiously. "Oh, yes," he hastened to add, noticing the injured way Borden took it, "I'm glad you are here to draw a picture of the man who tried to blow us up, but I was almost sure it was—well, a fellow we know, and have every reason to fear. But it isn't!"

"I see, I see," murmured the tramp thoughtfully, and he ran his eye more critically than ever over his handiwork. "Ye-es," he continued slowly, "it's a pretty fair picture. He doesn't seem familiar to you; eh?"

"No, I don't remember ever having seen a face like that before," answered Hiram, doubtfully.

"Just as well, I reckon. He'd be no advantage to anybody, that fellow wouldn't. Well, that's the

fellow you want to go after, provided you intend to."

"Dave will," declared Hiram with vim. "There's some mean hangers-on in our line, and lots of jealousy, and it's led to danger and loss for us several times before this. The management here will take this matter up, if we make a complaint about it. Dave's going to. I could see that from the look on his face when he went off just now. Thanks!" he shouted to a young fellow on a motor cycle who flashed by, flipping an envelope to Hiram. He had a gold braided "M" on his cap, indicating that he was a grounds messenger acting as post-boy in distributing the mail to the various hangars. "Why," added Hiram with increased animation of manner, as he scanned the printed words in one corner of the envelope, "it's from Chicago, and the headquarters of the International Meet Association we were talking about not an hour ago. I wonder ——"

Hiram strolled off by himself, looking out for Dave, and building all kinds of air castles. In about five minutes his chum put in an appearance. Hiram ran towards him, waving the envelope, and placed it in his hands. Dave opened it. His assistant watched his face keenly, and was gratified to note that it assumed a pleased expression.

"It's from the people offering all those prizes we

were talking about; isn't it, Dave?" questioned his eager assistant.

"Yes," replied the other, "it's from the committee of the big International meet. They invite us to participate, Hiram."

"Us?" repeated Hiram—"Oh, yes! You can be sure they'd ask you, though. What you going to do about it?"

"Oh, we'll think it over. They write that they are sending the details, such as rules and restrictions, in a later mail. We'll study them when they come."

Of course Hiram, in his impetuous way, was ready to take up any proposition in the aviation line, no matter how important. To him Dave was the one champion in the field able to compete with all rivals. He had been with Dave long enough, however, to get used to his methodical business-like ways. Hiram was eager to plunge at once into the merits of the new proposition, but he knew that Dave had put the matter aside until he was ready to take it up for real action.

"Oh, say, Dave," Hiram changed the subject, "come along till I show you the picture our tramp friend has drawn. That's the man who tried to blow us up," he announced, as they reached the side of the hangar where the sheet of manilla paper was tacked.

Dave surveyed the sketch critically. He saw at a glance that the artist had caught some strong facial characteristics of the person whose likeness he had attempted to draw. The young birdman shook his head slowly.

"Don't know him?" broke in Hiram questioningly—"neither do I. Anybody would again, though, if that sketch looks like him. See here, Dave," and Hiram was very serious and impressive, "it's just such mean tricks as this one that have been the start of all kinds of trouble for us. We want to nip it in the bud this time. What do they say up at the office?"

"They promise a thorough investigation. There has been quite a lot of vandal work at the different meets, and they say they will spare no pains, or expense, to run down the fellows who are discrediting our exhibitions. Want to speak to me?" asked Dave in a kindly tone, noticing the tramp hovering about near them as if he had something on his mind.

"Why, yes," answered Borden. "You fellows have been mighty good to me, and I feel as if I owed you something. I'm no detective, or anything of that sort, but if it's a point to you to find out something about the original of that picture——"

"I should say it was!" interrupted Hiram, strenuously.

"Then, as I'm the one who saw him closest, and

who know him best, maybe I'd be luckiest in recognizing him on sight. I'll take a little scurry around, if you say so, and try to run him down, or head him off, and find out what's back all this."

"Vernon, our old-time enemy is back of it, or else some envious chaps who think you may go to this new meet, and who want to keep you out of it because they know you'll win," whispered Hiram to Dave.

"That is a very good idea," said the latter to Borden. "You think you saw this same man hanging around the grounds last evening? You might come across him again by keeping your eyes open. Suppose you do that now? Here's a little change you may need," and the young aviator slipped some silver coins into the man's hand. "Hiram, the management here are talking about a bonus-flight the end of this week. I'm interested and have promised to meet with the directors in an hour. I suppose you want to take your regular fly with the *Scout*?"

"I've counted on it," replied Hiram promptly, "but some one ought to keep a close watch around the hangar, I suppose."

"Oh, I don't think we'll be troubled in the day time," answered Dave. "You can arrange with the grounds watchman to look in on our property from

time to time. You won't be gone very long, I suppose?"

"Oh, just a scurry across country, and back," replied Hiram, with a nonchalance manifestly affected, and Dave smiled to himself, suspecting that his young assistant was up to something as he recalled to his mind the mysterious bags that Hiram had been making.

Surely enough, those same bags played a part in the later proceedings of the ardent young amateur airman. The tramp had started off on his mission, promising to report his possible discoveries that same evening. Dave followed him in the direction of the office of the grounds. Hiram, left alone, bustled about in the most active enjoyment of one of those occasions when he was given a chance to test out the knowledge of air-sailing he had acquired under the tuition of his gifted chum. He threw open the doors of the hangar, and, as the bright sunlight streamed in, stood in a sort of rapt dream surveying the two machines exposed to his view.

"The beauties!" he cried, his sparkling eyes resting first upon the *Ariel* and then upon the *Scout*.

The *Ariel* was the very latest model in the aeroplane line. It succeeded the famous *Comet*. That was the fine machine in which Dave and his friends had made their trip around the world. The *Comet*

had been built more for rough usage and staying power, than for fancy sprints or stunts. It was now an honored relic in the show rooms of the Interstate Aero Company. Only a few weeks before the present introduction of the reader to our young hero, Mr. Brackett had delighted his young protégé by shipping to him, at the Midlothian grounds, the latest model in air craft.

The *Ariel* flew as a parasol-type biplane. It gratified Dave to note that the manufacturer had followed out many incidental suggestions he, himself, had made from time to time, when visiting the plant which Mr. Brackett practically owned. The main planes of the new machine enabled easy entrance to, and exit from, the cockpit. The pilot had an unhampered view in all directions. The craft had a maximun span of thirty-five feet and a chord of seven feet.

The area of the main planes was two hundred and twenty-five square feet. The over-all length of the machine was twenty-five feet, while the weight, empty, was nine hundred pounds. The motor was of radial construction and of the six-cylinder type, having a bore and stroke of five by six inches respectively. A speed of about eighty miles per hour was easily attained by the machine loaded with fifty gallons of gasoline and ten of lubricant, as an average for a three-hour flight.

"Want some help?" inquired a man from a neighboring hangar, strolling up to the spot.

"Just a mere lift," replied Hiram briskly. "The little *Scout* acts just as anxious to get up cloud-chasing as I am."

"Ready," announced the helper, getting into position.

"Let her go," ordered the enthusiastic young airman in a tone like a hurrah, his quivering fingers clutching wheel and control, and thrilling to the tips with animation and delight.

It was a superb day. Air, sky and wind currents were propitious for an easy flight. To Hiram there was nothing in the world equal to that delightful sensation of skimming through the air like a bird. It was almost rapture to realize that the turn of a wrist, or the pressure of his foot sent the airy, graceful fabric of steel and wood far aloft, like a pinion-poised eagle, ascending safely through space as would a speeding swallow arrow-aimed for a long, deep dive.

Hiram struck a course due west, once aloft at a convenient level. Eyes and mind were fixed upon a direct point in view. At the end of an hour he was out of sight of the camp and the air craft practicing in the vicinity of the exhibition grounds.

Between two settlements, some fifteen miles apart, Hiram began to descend. It was where a two

mile reach of level pasture land intervened, dotted here and there with underbrush and stunted trees. The *Scout* landed and its young pilot alighted. Under one arm he carried some sheets of white paper. He halted to place one of these on the ground, holding it flat by stones weighing down its corners. He then proceeded fully half a mile farther, again placed a sheet on the ground, gradually, in like manner, making a circle of fully a mile and a half. Finally he came back to the *Scout,* and got up into the air again.

"Target practice!" chuckled Hiram, as he circled away from the spot, made a sharp turn and volplaned full speed, as though aiming to land, nose first, directly upon the first white sheet in his course. Hiram made a magnificent dive. He swung over the control so that fifty feet from the ground the machine turned the reverse arc of a circle of nearly two hundred feet. His hand shot down beside him and grasped one of the bags, lifted it, aimed it and practically fired it at the "target" in view.

"Missed," he grimly observed, but quite pleased all the same, for the bag landed flat and did not roll, and lay not two feet away from its intended mark.

"Hit it!" crowed the excited Hiram as, with a second swoop, he made a direct hit of the second target with a second bag. The third was a miss. The fourth was like the second.

"If I can make it that good, what can't Dave Dashaway do?" soliloquized the young aeronaut, as he gathered up the bags and replaced them in the *Scout*. "I'll spring the scheme on him just as soon as he makes up his mind to go into that International contest, which he's just *got* to do!"

Hiram went afloat once more, determined on a swift run west, a turn, and then a course homeward bound.

"Hum!" he chuckled. "If any of the airmen saw my maneuvers with those bags they'd think I was practicing to go over to Europe and drop bombs. Now what does that mean?" murmured the lad suddenly, and, with a quick start, Hiram slackened his speed, to study out the details of a lively scene in progress directly beneath him.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNDER DOG

"I'm not going to stand that!" suddenly shouted Hiram, and he started a spiral descent, on the spur of the moment.

The young airman was warm-hearted and impulsive. Hiram was usually in the midst of any "scrimmage" going on in his vicinity, but it was generally when his sympathy, or chivalry, were aroused from interest in others. Just now all that was manly in him awakened his natural championship of "the under dog in a fight."

Just below him was a wide swampy spot, and about forty feet from the solid land, edging it on one side, were two men. One of them, portly and mean-faced, was waving a cane and shouting angrily at a younger companion. This individual was wading stumblingly towards him. His feet were mired in the soft, mushy soil, and the water came up to his waist.

Upon a little swamp-island was a ragged, bare-

footed boy of about sixteen. He had a broad piece of tree bark in his hand. This he was using as a scoop. Dipping it down in the black, watery mire near the edge of the swamp, he would lift it aloft. Then with a dash and a swing he would fling it at the retreating man in the water.

At a glance Hiram read the situation. The boy looked like a half-starved runaway. The old man resembled some cruel relative, or guardian. He was in a fury. Suddenly he seized a flat stone at his feet, and sent it whizzing through the air. It landed against the boy's cheek, drawing the blood.

"Now's your chance—make for him!" cried the older man.

His younger and mired helper half turned, but it was to find the boy not yet out of the ring. The latter staggered slightly under the blow he had received, and the bark scoop dropped from his hand. He quickly picked it up, however, and sent into the face of his returning foe a deluge of black, blinding muck. The man rubbed his eyes, veered about again and made for the shore.

The irate old man was brandishing his cane, and shouting. He seemed to be censuring his defeated aide, who, dripping and bespattered, stood disgustedly on dry land.

"They're trying to corner that boy, and he's too plucky to let them," decided Hiram. "There goes

another stone. Good! it missed, and the boy is safe under cover."

The lad had slipped behind a tree, but he kept the scoop in his hand. The two men gesticulated and parleyed. Finally the old man pointed toward a little settlement about a mile away. His companion started in that direction. The old man mopped his head with his handkerchief. Then he sat down under the shade of a tree as if exhausted with rage and his unusual exercise.

"He's sent for help; maybe for the police," reflected Hiram. "Right or wrong, the boy looks in need of a friend. I'm going to know the ins and outs of this affair."

So far no one of the three persons in sight had caught a view of the descending machine, so absorbed had they been in the conflict in which they were engaged. At the sound of the snort of the exhaust of the aeroplane, however, the barefooted lad started nervously, and looked up.

The *Scout* had landed in the middle of a clear spot edged by some bushes. Hiram who had some time since shut off the power, faced the astonished lad not twenty feet away from him.

"Hello!" he hailed, leaping out, and advancing. "What's the trouble here?"

For a second or two the lad did not speak. The startling appearance of airship and pilot seemed to

benumb him. He looked appealingly at Hiram, as though trying to figure out whether his strange and unexpected arrival meant help or harm. Then, something in the friendly face of the newcomer seemed partially to reassure him. His wan face twitched and his lips puckered.

"I'm in trouble," he said—"terrible trouble."

"Those men, I suppose?" questioned Hiram, pointing to the spot across the watery space.

"Yes, I've been on a run for hours, till I'm ready to drop. I thought I was safe here on this island, but they hunted me out. I've been fighting them off for nearly an hour."

"Who are they, anyway?" asked Hiram.

"That old man claims to be my uncle. The other fellow he sent to town to get a constable, and hunt me out, is one of the half a dozen bad men he's in with. Oh, he's led me a terrible life! I just had to break away from him. I couldn't stand it any longer. Oh, is there any way to keep me out of their hands?"

The speaker looked up in a beseeching way. The tears were running down his wasted cheeks. Hiram was much stirred.

"Say, I'll do anything, any time, for a fellow in the fix you're in, if I believe he's right!" he cried valiantly. "I think you are. That old man has seen us now. Look at him rage."

By this time the older man, on the mainland, had caught sight of the newcomer and of the machine that had brought Hiram to the rescue. He leaped to his feet, and seized his cane. He ran, brandishing it, to the edge of the water.

"Hey, say; you there!" he yelled. "Whoever you are, don't you dare to interfere. The law will soon be here, and attend to that young rascal."

"Yes, it will be all over for me when the constable comes," choked out the lad by Hiram's side "Please, please help me, if you can! I don't care for myself. It's my little sister. They could hammer me, and I'd grin and bear it, but when they began on her I simply had to get away."

"Little sister—what? Where?" inquired Hiram, in perplexity.

"Look there," was the response, and the boy parted some bushes. Hiram uttered a wondering and a pitying cry, as he looked over the shoulder of his guide and saw a little girl, not more than four years of age. She was lying asleep on the dry grass, her head pillowed on a coat, evidently belonging to the lad, her brother. Her attire was as torn and threadbare as his own. Her face showed tear stains and exhaustion.

"Oh, dear! Dear!" murmured the pitying Hiram at the sight of such forlorn misery.

"If you don't think I'm telling you the truth, just

look there!" cried the lad brokenly, and he leaned over and gently pulled loose the poor thin dress covering the child. Across her shoulders were half a dozen dark welts.

"That man over there did that," sobbed the barefooted boy. "Wouldn't you run away for that? Wouldn't you want to hit that mean man over yonder, if he treated a sister of yours that way?"

Hiram Dobbs fired up in a flash. He ran forward and shook his fist at the man in view. Then he looked in the direction of the town. The messenger sent thither was out of sight. Hiram cooled down.

"That fellow will soon be back with the officers of the law," he said. "We mustn't lose any time, I suppose. Do you know what that is?" he questioned his companion, pointing to the *Scout*.

"It's an airship; isn't it?" asked the boy. "I've seen one or two of them before."

"Yes, it's a biplane," explained Hiram. "There's a second seat in it, but it can't carry a very heavy load, but I am sure, though, it will hold you and your sister. Pick up that poor little thing and I'll show you how to get aboard. You're not afraid?" he questioned.

"Me? No. I'd jump aboard a balloon if it would get little Lois safe out of the clutches of old Martin Dawson!" cried the lad.

The little girl stirred and moaned, as her brother lifted her in his arms. Hiram piloted him with his burden to the side of the *Scout.* He helped him step over the controls, eased him back into the seat and strapped him in, the little one in his lap.

"Snug and safe," he spoke. "All you've got to do is to shut your eyes if you get dizzy. Now then, you old tyrant!" added Hiram speaking in the direction of the storming stamping man across from them, "we'll set you a pace you couldn't follow with all the constables in creation."

The young aviator had to make three different efforts to clear the ground. It was not a very good spot for a start. Finally, however, the *Scout* gained enough momentum and made a graceful dart up into the air.

"Law!—stop!—arrest!"—fuming, and shaking his cane, the old man cried in disjointed fragments frantic threats after the vanishing air craft.

"Look there!" chuckled Hiram to the passenger behind him. Then he laughed outright, and, notwithstanding his anxiety and his miseries, the boy laughed, too.

His persecutor, eyes fixed aloft, following the vanishing *Scout,* had not heeded his steps. Coming too near the slimy edge of the swamp he lost his balance. With a splash he went flat, face first, into a bed of black sticky mud.

CHAPTER V

THE BIG EVENT

Nor a word was spoken by either Hiram or his passenger as the *Scout* took its average altitude. The former was busy at his post. As to the other, holding the sleeping child in his lap, he sat like one entranced. The rescue from unfriendly hands, the odd situation in which he found himself, the novelty of a flight he had never before anticipated, fairly overcame him.

The able young pilot set out on a glide of easy progress. Then he had time to speak a few words to his fellow passenger.

"Comfortable?" he inquired.

"I could stay here forever!" ardently breathed, rather than spoke, the boy. "I never dreamed of such a wonderful thing as this airship. Oh, but you must know a lot, to be able to fly around up here in this way!"

"Huh! you'd ought to see what my chum, Dave Dashaway, can do," vaunted the loyal Hiram. "Well, we've got away from that old rascal back there, anyhow."

"I hope I may never see him again," replied the lad with a shudder. "I don't think I'll ever forget what you've done for us in all our troubles."

"What's your idea now?" inquired Hiram in an off-handed way. "I suppose you had some plan when you gave that old man the slip?"

"Well, yes, I had," was the reply. "I was thinking of poor little Lois only, though. I was trying to get to a place called Benham."

"Where's that?" asked Hiram.

"It's about fifty miles from the town near the island where you came across me," explained the boy. "I was making for the railroad when Mr. Dawson and the man with him came up with me. I thought if I could do that, and get into an empty box car, or something like that, with little Lois, we might get a ride clear to Benham. Then I would know what to do."

"And what is that?" inquired Hiram, with interest.

"There's a children's home there. I've heard all about it. I don't know anybody there, but I'm sure they would take in Lois. If I can only get her in a safe, comfortable place for a time, I'll soon find work, and earn a home for her," he said eagerly.

"You've got some good ideas," commented Hiram, "and I can see you are of the right sort. I'll take you to Benham. I don't exactly know

where it is, but it will not be hard to find out. You just forget all your troubles, and take it easy back there, and I'll do the rest."

After running about twenty miles, keeping well in line with the towns and settlements dotting the landscape beneath and ahead of them, Hiram descended at the edge of a little village. He left his passenger in charge of the machine, and was gone about half an hour. When he returned he brought with him a package of food and a bottle of milk.

The little child had awakened by this time. Her brother had evidently made her understand what had transpired, for she regarded the young airman in a friendly, grateful way, and prattled out new thanks when Hiram invited her to the modest but appetizing meal he had provided.

"I've got our bearings now, and can get you to Benham straight as an arrow," reported Hiram. "You didn't tell me your name," he added, looking his companion searchingly in the eyes, inviting his confidence, for he was curious to learn more about him.

His companion hesitated, flushed, and acted confused and undecided. Then he said frankly:

"I've often thought if I ever got free of Mr. Dawson that I would take a new name, and get thousands of miles away from him, so he could never find me again. I've got to tell you anything

you want to know, though. My name is Bruce Beresford. My sister and I are orphans. That man, Dawson, has always had a legal hold on us, and he has treated us cruelly. I suppose there are hundreds of fellows in the world just as unfortunate as I am, but when you have a little sister like Lois to look after, and protect——"

There the speaker broke down. Hiram was full of genuine pity for the two waifs. He, too, admired the fidelity of the thoughtful and affectionate brother. He did not ask any more questions. It seemed to be a simple case—two unprotected orphans cruelly treated by a heartless guardian.

As they neared Benham Hiram landed at the edge of the place, so as not to attract undue attention to the biplane or his companions.

"I'm interested enough in you to wait here, and have you report how you get on with your arrangements about the little girl," he said to Bruce Beresford.

"You're taking a heap of trouble for a stranger," murmured his companion.

"You're no stranger," declared Hiram. "I seem to have known you a long time, although I've only been with you a couple of hours. I guess it's because you're square and honest. Go ahead, and good luck to you!"

The girl waved her thin little hand to Hiram until

they were out of sight. The young aviator then busied himself about the machine. He was so engrossed in his task that he was not conscious of the flight of time, when Bruce Beresford came running into sight with a radiant face.

"It's all right," he proclaimed. "They've taken in little Lois, just as if she was an own child. The matron kissed her, and cried over her bruises. Of course I didn't tell them anything about Mr. Dawson by name. I've agreed to send the home ten dollars each month as soon as I get work. Oh, what a relief! and how easy I can do it," and the speaker threw out his arms with a gesture that seemed to say he was ready for the hardest work in the world if he could find it.

"I've been thinking about you," said Hiram. "What's the matter with your coming with me? I've got a famous chum, and I'm sure he'll take to you. I'm certain, too, he can get you a place somewhere."

"You're awful kind," responded Bruce, "but I would like to stay around Benham here until I see how Lois gets on. She might miss me. Dawson might trace us. I can get some odd jobs around town for a few weeks, I am sure. Then, soon as I know Lois is safe and contented, I'll branch out in a bigger city."

"Well, you've got the right spirit," encouraged

Hiram. "I want you to keep trace of us. Maybe we can help you out. You'll always be able to locate us through this address," and Hiram gave his new friend a card, naming the present headquarters of himself and Dave. He could see the tears of gratitude and gladness shining in the eyes of Bruce as he sailed aloft.

"Glad I helped him," soliloquized Hiram. "Poor fellow! And that tiny little midget of a sister! And that big, mean old Dawson! I hope he got a good soaking! Hope I run across this Beresford boy again, too. He's the right sort!"

The young airman had put the *Scout* away in the hangar in good order, after a careful clean up, and was ready to sit down on the bench out in the open air, when Dave put in an appearance. Hiram was too full of his recent adventure to postpone its recital. His chum listened with interest to its details. Hiram, however, made no mention of his "target practice."

"There's something here to interest you," observed Dave, drawing a bulky envelope from his pocket. "It's the details of the Chicago contest meet, that followed the invitation from the committee," and Hiram looked at the advertising literature with interest.

"Why, Dave," he cried, glancing over the list of prizes offered, and the programme outlined for a

three days' meet, "you surely won't let this slip by?"

"I wish very much to enter," was the reply. "Of course, though, that depends on what Mr. Brackett says."

Hiram showed his impatience and suspense.

"See here!" he cried, "you can't wait on anything so indefinite as his coming here, maybe in a day; maybe in a week."

"I don't intend to wait," remarked Dave. "In fact, I telegraphed him this morning, after I had thought things over, giving him an idea of the importance and scope of the meet. Here's his answer, which I received not half an hour since."

Hiram took the open telegram tendered by his chum. It read:

"Will be with you to-morrow morning."

"Hurrah!" shouted the irrepressible Hiram, in his delight hopping from one foot to the other. "Oh, Dave, I feel in my bones that you are going to make the hit of your life!"

CHAPTER VI

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

"Go in by all means, Dave."

It was Mr. Brackett, the aircraft manufacturer, who spoke, and never was a decision more welcome to boyish ears than this announcement. Prompt with his engagement, as was his business rule, the President of the Interstate Aero Company had arrived at the Midlothian grounds at eight o'clock in the morning, of the day succeeding Hiram's adventure with the *Scout*.

There had been warm greetings, for Dave felt deeply grateful to the wealthy manufacturer who had so advanced his interests. His impetuous assistant was equally responsive. As to Mr. Brackett, it had been a great satisfaction for him to realize that his young protégés had not only made good the promise of their early professional career, but had largely been the means of popularizing the machines turned out at his plant.

He had listened to all that Dave had to say, had gone over the papers sent from the promoters of

the International meet at Chicago, had considered for a few moments, and then had settled the matter of Dave's participation in the six words above noted. Hiram's eyes sparkled. A dazzling picture of new fame and sure success came into his imaginative mind.

"I've got to say something or bust, Mr. Brackett!" he exploded. "I hardly slept last night for thinking of it all. Why, where should Dave be but in the front ranks at Chicago? A first-class prize meet would be second-class without the aviator who won the trans-Atlantic medal, and looped the loop at Philadelphia ahead of all the competitors, and invented all the new wrinkles in hydro-aeroplane work at Cape May, and——"

"There, there, Hiram—that will do," interrupted Dave, but smiling indulgently. "From the entrants' list they send us there will be no ordinary talent at the Chicago meet and no worn-out stunts will pass. We've got to better ourselves and prepare for real work, if we expect to make a showing."

"You've got the last word, the real finishing touch in the *Ariel,* Dave," reminded Mr. Brackett.

"I appreciate that, yes, indeed," responded the young airman warmly, and with pride. "And it means half the battle."

"I suppose you can realize our interest in this meet," continued Mr. Brackett. "If the *Ariel* wins,

it standardizes our new model in a manner, and means thousands of dollars in effective advertising for the Interstate Aero Company."

"I'm going to do my level best," Dave assured him, and he was so stirred with hope, faith and eagerness that he paced about restlessly. "There are some points I am sure of—distance flights, altitude and speed. None of them can meet the *Ariel* there. The stunt programme, though, is another thing. I want to study up on that and practice, and I would like to have a talk with the managers at Chicago as soon as possible."

"Just what I was about to suggest, Dave," said Mr. Brackett. "I don't see anything gained by your staying here at the Midlothian grounds. In fact, after what you tell me of the explosion yesterday morning, I strongly advise making a move. Has that tramp friend of yours shown up?"

"No, he hasn't reported, as I expected he would," replied Dave rather disappointedly, and the manufacturer looked thoughtful as though entertaining some suspicions. Hiram broke in with the words:

"He's true blue, though, Mr. Brackett; I'll vouch for him! If he hasn't got to us yet, it's because he hasn't found any trace of the man he's after."

"And have you no idea as to the motive for the attempt to destroy the *Ariel?*" asked the manufacfacturer.

"I have!" cried Hiram in his usual forcible way. "When we come to trace this thing down, we will certainly find that it goes back to that schemer, Vernon, who has made us so much trouble in the past."

"Have you heard anything of Vernon lately, Dave?" inquired Mr. Brackett.

"Nothing definite. Of course I realize that he would find it policy to keep out of our way. He knows we would advise the management of any meet where he might happen to be, that he is a dangerous man, and as such ought to be excluded by the Association."

"Yes, but cloud-work is all the fellow knows," suggested Hiram, "and he will naturally always be a hanger-on in that line. He's slick enough to work under cover. He's bad enough, too, to agree to do any unfair work a rival might want to have done against us. That dynamite wasn't planted in our hangar for fun. Look out for Vernon, I say, and look out sharp, for we haven't heard the last of him yet, you mark me!"

"Well, once at Chicago, you will find better protection," submitted Mr. Vernon. "Ah! whom have we here?"

"A thousand pardons," spoke an intruder, and there crossed the threshold of the hangar at that juncture Lieutenant Montrose Mortimer. The sus-

picion was instantly suggested to Dave that the reputed Englishman might have been lingering outside to choose this special moment for an appearance.

"Got a cablegram from my people abroad this morning, Dashaway," he continued glibly. "They are urging me to reach some definite results."

"This is Mr. Brackett, of whom I spoke to you yesterday, Lieutenant," said Dave, introducing the manufacturer. "He might be interested to hear of the remarkable aviation progress in England."

"Ah, just so, just so," assented the lieutenant, with a searching look at Mr. Brackett. "Why, sir, I have told our young friend here of the flight-camps the British admiralty have established at Aldershot. I have been commissioned to secure some good tutoring material, and the fame of Dashaway naturally led me to him. It is example and direction that our novices need, and I can promise fine pay and a permanency. We have the best Benoist models, Gyro motors, and every standard wrinkle. The war has made it just as insistent for us to secure the best birdmen as armament and shells."

The lieutenant rattled on at a great rate and Mr. Brackett listened quietly. Believing that he was impressing his audience, Mortimer drew some papers from his pocket, selected one, and began figuring

up the income possibilities of an energetic up to date expert like Dave.

"This is very interesting, Lieutenant Mortimer," said the manufacturer finally, "but I fear Mr. Dashaway is not in a position to accept your flattering offer."

"Regret—disappointed. I could cable my people for more liberal terms if——"

"It would be of no use," said Mr. Brackett. "Dashaway is going to enter for the Chicago meet, and will leave here forthwith."

"Oh, indeed!" observed their visitor, as if he had received a valuable piece of news, and he arose quickly, brushing pencil and paper to the floor. "Sorry! Going to make it in this superb biplane of yours, Dashaway?"

"Yes, we shall take the *Ariel* with us, of course," replied Dave. He said it reluctantly, however. He had noted a subtle eagerness in the face of his questioner that he did not like.

"That fellow is a fraud," broadly announced the manufacturer, as the alleged representative of the British admiralty bowed his way out of the hangar.

"That's been my opinion all along," echoed Hiram promptly. "You can speak right out," he added to Dave. "The fellow's out of sight. I followed him purposely to the door, for he looked as if he might be thinking of sneaking around to over-

hear what we might say. He noticed me, and bolted for it. Say, did you see him prick up his ears and act sort of rattled, when you told him that we were going to leave here?"

"That struck me," acquiesced Mr. Brackett. "As I said, he is palpably a fraud."

"Why do you say that, Mr. Brackett?" inquired Dave.

"Because I happen to know something about the aircraft situation in England. The big operating point for military aviation requirements is not at Aldershot, but at the Brookland Motor Course and Flying Grounds, which has been taken over by the government for tests and speed trials, the general public being strictly excluded."

"Huh!" bristled up Hiram, thinking hard—"what's coming along now?"

"Another thing," resumed the manufacturer, "when this lieutenant of yours speaks of Benoists and Gyro Motors, he is talking about something he does not understand. The principal flyers adopted by the admiralty are American models, and the Green water cooled engine has just won the two hundred and fifty thousand dollar prize in the national test in England."

"Why, what can the man's object be in going to all this trouble and duplicity?" asked Dave.

"It doesn't look clear, nor right, to me, Dave,"

answered Mr. Brackett. "If this is another part of some plot to do you, or your machine harm, it is high time that you were away from here and,——"

"It is!" startlingly interrupted Hiram. "Say, I've got the key to the whole business!"

Both Mr. Brackett and Dave stared at the speaker in wonderment. Hiram was very much excited. He was waving something in his hand, but it was not the "key" to which he alluded. It was, in fact, the piece of paper on which Lieutenant Montrose Mortimer had been figuring that Hiram had picked up from the floor of the hangar.

"Look there!" he shouted, exhibiting its reverse side. "See! It's a telegram from Chicago. Read it, and see if I've been guessing wrong all along!"

Hiram held the sheet so that his companions could plainly read the following alarming message:

"Keep Dashaway and his machine out of the race at any cost."

And it was signed: "Vernon."

CHAPTER VII

THE HIDDEN HAND

"HURRAY!" cheered Hiram Dobbs enthusiastically—"we're off! Oh, Dave, this is life!"

"We are going to make this a record attempt, Hiram," the young aviator advised his excited assistant. "Got the sealed barographs in place? All right. If we should really do something quite stunning, at the end of the flight we'll submit results to the contesting committee of the governing organization at New York City."

"A cross country flight as the crow flies!" cried Hiram. "It must be over three hundred and fifty miles. Dave, what do you expect?"

"If this cross wind doesn't interfere, I calculate about three hours and thirty minutes."

"Why, that would beat the Western record," suggested Hiram, wonderingly.

"That's what I am setting out to do," answered the young airman quietly. "We are tanked up forty-six gallons, and enough oil to last us for a five hour run."

The *Ariel* made three trips around the Midlothian grounds, and then struck her going level. The main plates of the machine were so arranged above the fuselage or framework, that pilot and observer had an almost unlimited range of vision. Dave experienced a sense of relief at leaving a spot where trouble seemed to menace them. Hiram comfortably belted in, had eyes open for everything. This was his second trip in the *Ariel,* and the novelty of the machine had not yet worn off for him.

There was a minor trial course outside the Midlothian grounds, given over to amateurs and noneligibles. There both Dave and his chum noticed a good many ambitious airmen trying out their machines. Several of them set the *Ariel* a pace, but all but two of them soon fell behind. One of these, a full type Curtiss, held a fair follow-up at a distance.

"Looks as if it was headed for Chicago, too; that particular machine," observed Hiram. "Do we follow the railroad, Dave?"

It's the clearest and best course, I think," responded the pilot of the *Ariel.* "Did you leave word for our tramp friend, Borden?"

"Yes, with that accommodating fellow at the next hangar to ours. I left a little note telling him to wire us if he made any important discoveries. Say, Dave, do you suppose that fraud lieutenant will show up again?"

"I think we must be careful all along the line," was the reply, delivered gravely. "That telegram showed that our old-time enemy, Vernon, is after us. The lieutenant, and undoubtedly the man whose picture Borden drew, are certainly working in the interest of Vernon."

"But what can he be after?" persisted Hiram, in a nettled way because he could not probe the mystery.

"That will develop later," answered the young air pilot. "To my way of thinking, and also that of Mr. Brackett, our enemy has offered his services to some contestant we do not yet know. Now we've picked up the railway. That will be our guide to our terminus."

The biplane had been given a careful investigation and adjustment. Dave had driven onward and upward until they had attained an altitude of five hundred feet. Hiram had been watching a receding speck, the Curtiss machine, that seemed bent on their own course, when, turning, he touched Dave sharply on the shoulder, and called loudly above the throb of the motor:

"There's a heavy cloud-bank ahead."

"I see that," spoke the pilot of the *Ariel*.

"It ends in a mean fog, earthward."

"Yes, I notice that, too. I tell you, Hiram, we are safer up here, under the circumstances, than

trying to get down. We'll nose up to a still higher altitude and get above the clouds."

"We're nearly touching the seven thousand mark," reported Hiram, a few minutes later. "It's clear sailing ahead, though."

Because of the maneuver just attempted, the two young airmen became mixed as to their course. For some time neither saw the earth again. Dave tried to allow for the same drift as before, but could only hope that he was steering in the right direction.

"There's a change in the atmospheric conditions," announced Dave's assistant, after a while.

"Yes," responded Dave, "there's a storm raging below."

"And ahead, too," added Hiram.

"We've got to get above those newly formed clouds," declared Dave, and he shot the machine still higher up.

"Dave!" cried his companion, "I never saw anything so beautiful! Isn't this grand!"

It was, indeed, an unusual sight. Dazzling white clouds paved a seeming highway beneath them in every direction. Overhead the sun was shining brilliantly. The light reflected upon the cloud-mass was so intense that it affected the eyes as snow blindness would.

"It's getting terribly cold!" Hiram remarked, shivering.

"Yes," answered Dave, with a glance at the thermometer, "two degrees above freezing point," and even through his leather suit he could feel the sharp and piercing cold. The wind above the clouds came straight from the north. Below it was blowing from the northwest. It was a wonderful sight about then, and it reminded the young aviator strongly of past experiences in the polar regions, while on his famous trip around the world. He did his best to keep a due east course, but had no landmarks to steer by, and he decided they must have drifted far to the south.

At last there were rifts in the clouds, which began breaking up, giving a sight of the ground.

"We've been up here nearly three hours," announced Hiram, "and the gasoline is giving out."

A slow glide brought them directly over a large farm. They made out great stacks of hay, and the *Ariel* settled down like a tired-out bird in the center of these fields.

"There's a man—with a gun!" Hiram sharply exclaimed.

Dave, alighting, saw a farmer, of middle age. He, indeed, had a gun—but he set this, and a game bag, alongside a haystack, and advanced towards them with no indication of antagonism.

"That was a pretty slick landing," he said. "No fire about your machine, is there?"

"None at all," answered Dave. "I have shut off everything."

"I was thinking of the haystacks," explained the farmer. "You've got a fine machine there. I've seen some, they're getting so common they often come out this way."

"We have run out of gasoline," said Dave. "Do you happen to have a supply?"

"I don't, for a fact," was the reply, "but I happen to know my nearest neighbor has. If you want to come up to the house, and wait a bit, I'll send one of my men after it."

"We need quite a quantity," said Dave, "and will be glad to pay a good price."

"A bite of something to eat wouldn't come in amiss, either," suggested Hiram.

"I reckon we can accommodate you in that particular," said the farmer. "Make things snug, lads, and come up to the house."

He led the way, chatting busily. Dave soon discovered that he was up-to-date, readily pleased with novelty, very inquisitive and hospitable in the extreme. He learned of the extent of the needs of his guests, and forthwith sent a hired man with a wagon over to the neighbor's for gasoline. Then, as his visitors were comfortably seated on a screened porch, with chairs and a table on it, he left them for the kitchen of the house.

"The girl will fetch some victuals in a few minutes," he advised the boys upon his return. "Sort of enjoyable, eating here in the air. Big meet out in Chicago, I understand?"

"Yes, we are going there," said Dave, and from then on he was kept busy answering the questions "fired" at him rapidly by their curious host.

"I declare! that's an interesting trade of yours," he said. "But here's the victuals. Sort of out of reg'lar meal-time order, but you'll find it all right, I hope."

Hiram was very hungry, and ate the cold roast beef, biscuits and fried potatoes served in plentitude, with the keen appetite of a hungry boy. Dave, too, enjoyed the palatable lunch.

"I suppose it's a great bracer to get away up in the air," observed the farmer. "Through, youngsters?"

"No. I say!— Why, where is that?" suddenly ejaculated Hiram.

He had leaped up unceremoniously from the table, and advanced to the end of the porch.

"Hear that chugging, Dave?" he inquired, peering up into the sky. "There's a machine somewhere aloft. Oh, here's the screen door! I want to look. There she is!" he shouted, once out in the yard, and staring upwards. "Dave, it's the Curtiss we thought was taking up our course!"

"Then they've made as good time as we have," called back Dave. "What now?" for Hiram had uttered a new cry of excitement.

"Why, I say!" he shouted. "That's strange! It's suddenly vanished!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECRET FOE

THE young pilot of the *Ariel* was sufficiently interested to follow his assistant down into the yard. The farmer followed. Three pairs of eyes scanned the sky with no result.

"I say, it's queer," persisted Hiram, trying to get a new focus of view by running about out of range of surrounding trees and buildings.

"Mebbe they alighted behind the barn," suggested the farmer.

"Then they pretty nearly came straight down," declared Hiram.

"There's a holler over beyond the orchard," explained the farmer.

"I'm going to find out where they landed," persisted Hiram, running away from the others.

He rounded the barn, a corn crib and then the windmill shed. He heard: "Chug—chug!" Keen as a ferret, the guiding sound spurred him on. Suddenly Hiram halted.

"There it is," he said to himself. "They

dropped, but they could not have touched the ground. Sure, it's the Curtiss. Why—the vandals!"

In a flash the quick senses of Dashaway's apprentice took the alarm. The antics of the Curtiss had been curious. Now something caught the attention of Hiram and awakened positive suspicion; alarm, too, for the strange machine arose from amid the haystacks where the *Ariel* had anchored.

"It means something," muttered Hiram, resuming his run. "Fire!"

For an instant he was appalled. A smell of smoke was wafted to his nostrils. Then, getting in range of the haystacks, he caught a gleam of leaping flames. Rounding the first great heap of fodder, Hiram uttered an angry cry. The Curtiss was sailing away, and it was fully evident that its occupants had descended purposely to set a match to the enormous heaps of hay within ready reach.

"They were after our machine!" shouted the lad, and he snatched up the gun the farmer had left behind him. It was double-barreled. Hiram fired twice. He fancied he could hear the shots rattle against the planes of the fast-swaying biplane aloft. Its speed was not diminished, however. He threw down the gun and made a dive through a fire-fringed space between the two nearest haystacks.

The one further along, near which the *Ariel* stood, was now a mass of wispy, shooting blaze.

Two others beyond it had also ignited. It was now that the lad ran fastest. His face was hot and blistered as he came up against the tail rudder of the imperiled machine with a force that gave him a rebound.

The smoke and the heat choked and blinded him. He bent his head and gave the running gear a start. He could not see before him now. With desperate resolve Hiram buckled down to his task. The aeroplane, upon which his hopes and interest were fixed so intensely, was in peril. He knew it was scorched, from the faint smell of melting varnish.

All he thought of was getting the *Ariel* outside the spreading circle of fire. He could choose no lanes between the numerous stacks, for the smoke now obscured everything. He had to trust to luck. Now he was running the machine along.

"The mischief!" uttered Hiram abruptly, and went spinning back half a dozen feet. He had driven the biplane squarely into an unseen stack. The rebound shook him loose. He stumbled and fell. Then his head met some hard solid substance and he closed his eyes with a groan—senseless.

It was the echo of the two shots that first aroused Dave Dashaway, who had stood looking after Hiram until he disappeared, and then awaited his return. The farmer had gone back to the porch, but now he ran down into the yard again with the words:

"Hello! that was my gun—I'd know its sound anywhere, I think."

"Then something is wrong," instantly decided Dave, quite stirred up. "I see nothing of the airship—"

"No," shouted the farmer, "but there's a fire!"

The moment he got beyond the barn, Dave also saw the smoke and flames.

"My haystacks!" cried the farmer.

"The *Ariel!*" murmured Dave. "And there is the biplane Hiram saw. Mr. Rudd, there's something wrong going on!" but the farmer was speeding towards the central scene of action. Dave broke into a run. He out-distanced his companion.

The stranger airship was now high up in the air, and heading due west. Dave could not make out those on board. He fancied there were two in the machine.

"Hiram! Hiram!" he shouted, and strained his gaze to try and locate the *Ariel.* A sudden flurry of wind lifted the smoke. Dave fancied he saw his machine. It was in the midst of the stacks and seemed doomed. Down a fire-fringed pathway he darted, however. Then, more by the sense of feeling than seeing, he came up against his sky-craft.

It was heroic work, for the heat was blistering, the smoke and cinders blinding. Dave discerned that the *Ariel* was wedged into the edge of a stack.

He drew it back, whirled it about heading a new way, and bore it along with a strong push.

He gave a great breath of relief as it wheeled free of the last stack. He fairly reeled the last few yards of progress. Free of the fire, he held to the tail of the machine for support. Dave was exhausted, almost overcome with the ordeal he had gone through. His leather suit, however, had saved him from being badly burned. As it was, his hair was singed and his face and hands red and blistered.

"Where is Hiram?" he breathed anxiously. Then Dave called his chum's name, steadied himself, and rubbed clear his cinder-filled eyes.

"Had a fall—stumbled right over your partner," panted the farmer, and he emerged from the blazing space with unsteady feet.

"Why, what's this?" cried Dave.

The farmer was half-carrying, half-dragging a human form. He flopped to the ground himself overcome, as he dropped his burden.

"Hiram!" exclaimed the young aviator, recognizing his senseless assistant.

"Lucky I found him," panted the farmer. "He lay on the ground the way he is now. My feet hit him, and I took a header. If I hadn't come across him, it would have been all day for him."

Dave was now kneeling at the side of his unconscious chum. He lifted Hiram's head. A damp

spot met his hand. Then he discovered a long scalp wound, bleeding profusely. The farmer stood dumbly viewing the destruction going on. He was of a philosophical turn, it seemed, for finally shrugging his shoulders resignedly he observed:

"Lucky most of it is poor swamp hay. It's got to go, I see that. Let it burn out, we can't save any of it, and I reckon it won't reach the sheds. Hurt bad?"

"I don't think so," replied Dave, but anxiously. "There's a cut in the back of his head."

"Mebbe he fell against one of the big stone weights used for holdng down the hay. See here, he's the first to think of. We must get him to the house."

Dave was anxious to do this. They ran the *Ariel* safely out of range of danger. Then they lifted Hiram and carried him in the direction of the house. By this time some field workers, near by and on neighboring farms, came running to the spot. They got rakes and bags and beat out the dry stubble surrounding the stacks, which had become ignited.

They put Hiram on a bench near the well, and the farmer filled a pail, and wetting his big handkerchief applied it to the head of the insensible lad. Its effect was noticed at once.

"Hello!" cried Hiram, sitting up and opening his eyes. "Where did those rascals get to, Dave?

Oh, I remember now!" Then his glance swept the blazing mass two hundred yards away. "Oh, Dave!" he exclaimed, the tears coming to his eyes. "I did what I could, but the *Ariel* is gone up!"

"No, 'tain't—your partner saved it!" spoke the farmer quickly.

At that glad news Hiram struggled to his feet. He was wild-eyed and still unsteady, but his old grit was fast returning.

"Dave," he cried, "don't let them get away—the fellows in that big Curtiss, I mean. They set that fire!"

CHAPTER IX

JUST IN TIME

"WHO is that man, Hiram?"

It was two days after the stirring adventure among the burning haystacks. They were now under a new and changed environment. Outside of a roomy hangar on the training grounds near Chicago, they seemed to have passed from a zone of peril and trickery into an atmosphere of order and security.

The chums had been oiling the *Scout,* which had been shipped to them from the Midlothian grounds the day previous. Dave had noticed a thin wiry man standing outside of their hangar and studiously regarding the *Ariel.* Then the stranger had moved nearer to them, and transferred a steady, almost insolent gaze to the young aviator. Hiram had been so absorbed in his task that he had not noted what the keen observation of Dave, always on the alert, had taken in. Now he straightened up and shot a glance at the stranger, just turning away.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "he's familiar. Why it's Valdec!"

"You don't mean the crack cloud-climber, as they call him, the Syndicate champion?" questioned his companion.

"That's him," went on Hiram. "Yes, that's 'the great and only.' I saw him down at the clubhouse last evening. Humph! I don't like him any better than I do his backer, and that's Worthington."

Dave viewed the rival airman from head to foot. He was not only curious, but interested. The chums had met a variety of amateurs and professionals since their arrival at the present centre of attraction in the aviation world. A portion of them were a motley group. They ranged from expert balloon trapezists to acrobatic notables. They were essentially "stunt" men. The real professionals were a widely different crowd. There were men who had earned fame in their particular line of activity. Some were inventors, and there was a sprinkling of scientists. The name, Valdec, however, Dave had heard a great many more times than that of any professional on the grounds.

Valdec was an importation. He claimed some wonderful records made in France and England. His specialty was the handling of a machine in speed, gyration and novelty effects. He had been a public demonstrator and exhibitor at big fairs in

Europe. His daring was notorious. He was a grim, unsocial specimen of humanity, and talked but little. His backers talked for him, however. These comprised the Syndicate, a group of oldtime racehorse and baseball promoters and the like. They had taken to the aviation field as the newest and likeliest sport where their peculiar abilities would count.

A great many standard airmen besides Dave did not like this feature of the great International meet. It was not to be helped, however. The manager, Worthington, paid for his special entrants, who were able to qualify. It was his business to finance them, and he claimed that such a connection was legitimate. The Syndicate group formed quite a camp of their own at one end of the grounds. There were over half a dozen airmen in the combination, covering various phases of flying, all out for prizes, and selected by the promoter as likely to win.

"Yes, that's Valdec," resumed Hiram. "I don't like him, nor his crowd, nor their hangers-on, but I will say the fellow can do things. When you were away yesterday he had half an hour's practice on spiral work. It was not only pretty, but it took away your breath. I heard one of the bystanders say that before Valdec makes one of his sensational dives, he works himself up to such a point that he is

perfectly reckless. That's his crowd—running things just as they would for a track race."

"Well, the steady nerve and the clear head counts in the wind up," observed Dave philosophically. "This job is done. Now for some real work."

It was not Dave's habit to "show off" nor to advise his rivals of his prospective programme. The location of the practice grounds was ideal. The country about was level, and there was a lake area over which long distance flights would be unhampered. The day before, however, and on the present occasion, as soon as both aviators were in their places in the machine, its pilot started a course for a barren uninhabited reach among the sand dunes twenty miles south of the grounds. Here they were unnoticed and had free scope.

"No danger of collisions here," observed the cheerful Hiram, as they landed and Dave sailed off alone. Then he sat down on a heap of brush and chucklingly announced himself as "an audience of one," prepared to enjoy the spectacle of the occasion.

"Bravo!" voted the loyal and enthusiastic lad, as Dave made a superb sweep that vied with a sailing pigeon, fleeing in terror from this unfamiliar monarch of the air.

Then Hiram clapped his hands loudly, and kicked with his feet, as though in some auditorium, and

bound to applaud, as Dave made a volplane that seemed destined to land the machine nose deep in the flickering sands. Suddenly, twenty feet from the ground, he balanced, even tipped, and went up, up, up—until machine and pilot were a mere speck.

"Hurrah!" rang out briskly, when the daring operator of the *Ariel* began a spiral drop. And then as Dave landed, his assistant, half wild with delight, was dancing from foot to foot. "Oh, I say," he shouted, "it's up to Valdec! Honest, Dave, it beats him. Yes, sir, it actually does!" and the faithful chum laughed, as though already he saw the capital prize of the meet safe in the hands of his friend.

The chums put in two hours about the flying field afforded by the sand dunes. They started back for the International grounds feeling duly satisfied. Dave was more satisfied with the *Ariel* than ever. The perfect piece of mechanism had never "balked" yet. Hiram professed to see new skill and expertness in his gifted chum with every succeeding flight.

"Let's take a view of the city before we go home," he suggested, and Dave was nothing loth.

"Doll houses and pigmies; eh?" submitted Hiram, as they flew over the south end of the city. "A little flat patch of the world, down there. Those vessels on the lake look like play-ships. That big skyscraper doesn't appear much larger than a

chicken house. There's some excitement!" and Hiram leaned over to get a better view of what had attracted his attention. "Dave," he cried suddenly, "it's a fire!"

Dave made out smoke and flames about a very high structure located near the river that traversed the heart of the city. He was as much interested as his companion, for a mimic play seemed going on below. Everything appeared in miniature—the hurrying fire engines, the puffing fire-boats on the river, the great crowds, the giant building wreathed with smoke. As they neared this Dave made out more clearly the situation.

"It seems to be a storage warehouse, built solid from the sixth story up," he said. "The lower stories are all on fire. It will be a bad blaze when it gets up into the closely sealed upper part."

"Dave," cried Hiram sharply—"look, look, on the roof!"

"Yes—a girl," responded Dave. "Why, Hiram, she is alone, and imprisoned up there by the fire!"

It was not difficult to understand the situation. The sixth floor of the building was probably the office of the warehouse. Such concerns hire but little help outside of the men who handle consignments for storage. The girl, probably a stenographer, must have been alone on the floor noted when the fire broke out.

She could not descend, for the five lower floors were all ablaze. Escape was cut off, except upwards. She had probably fled up the spiral staircases without coming to a break in the solid masonry, in the dark, and groping her way, and driven to frenzy by the pursuing smoke.

Now she was plainly visible to the two chums. She stood near the edge of the roof, waving her hands frantically. Below, the hook and ladder service attempted to reach her point of refuge, but they could not get above the eighth floor.

"Dave," spoke Hiram in a muffled tone that trembled, "can't we do something?"

Already the pilot of the *Ariel* had received the same mental suggestion. His eye took in all the chances. All that was chivalrous and humane in him came to the surface.

"There's just one way, Hiram," he said. "That is to make a volplane and a landing on the roof."

"Yes, yes," agreed Hiram eagerly. "It's a long narrow building, with plenty of room for a stop and a start."

"You're willing to risk it?"

"Yes—surely!" cried Hiram. "Don't delay, Dave. We're safe to try it, before the flames reach her, or the building collapses."

A great cry went up from the excited crowds in the streets below, at the sight of what resembled

some mighty winged bird coming on a mission of rescue and mercy, where other help seemed vain.

The girl on the roof saw the machine, and comprehended what it meant for her. She ran towards it with a glad cry as Dave dexterously directed it. The *Ariel* struck the smooth flat roof, and came to a stop, Hiram leaped out.

"This way!" he called, and, taking her outstretched hand he guided her to the seat he had just vacated, and belted her in. "Don't get scared, nor faint. You'll be safe on solid land in a jiffy. Go ahead, Dave," added Hiram. "The machine won't stand my weight on the narrow margin start we can give it."

Onward went the *Ariel.* To the spellbound crowd below it seemed to slide off the roof. Dave made a spiral drop. A block away from the fire there was a lumber yard, only half stocked, affording a good landing place.

The girl was out of the machine and safe in charge of two ladies who supported her. She turned to Dave, her lips moving as if in gratitude, and then swooned. Dave got started before the onrushing mob got in his way. It seemed to him as if the voices of thousands joined in a thunderous cheer. There on the roof, as if in response to this mighty tribute to daring heroism, stood Hiram,

smiling and unconcerned as though it were all an every day occurrence.

"Good for you, and quite in time," he commented briskly, as Dave landed on the roof in safety. "The fire is eating up through the staircases. See, yonder!" and the speaker pointed to wreaths of smoke and cinders shooting out through a roof trap as if forced by an air compressor.

"Something wrong with the control," said Dave, as they skidded into space again. "The jar of that roof, I guess. It needs fixing," and the young aviator was compelled to land again in the spot where he had delivered the imperiled girl into friendly hands.

CHAPTER X

A FRIEND IN DISGUISE

"DAVE, I'm famous!"

Hiram Dobbs burst into the little space just beyond the threshold of the hangar, which he had called "the office." The partitioned-off corner held some chairs and a table. Dave was busy glancing over a catalogue of aeroplane accessories, and he looked up with an inquisitive smile at his excitable assistant.

"Well, what now, Hiram?" he questioned.

"Look—your picture, my picture, the burning building, the *Ariel*. 'Daring aeronaut'—that's you. 'Heroic assistant'—that's me. See, isn't it great!"

The impetuous speaker had just come in from breakfast. He spread out a morning newspaper. Its first four columns held a vivid description of the warehouse fire. There had certainly been reporters at the scene, and photographers also, for four excellent pictures illuminated the printed page.

There was one scene of the swoop of the *Ariel*

to the roof of the building where the stenographer had stood, with clasped hands gazing helplessly down at the awed crowd, fourteen stories below.

Then there was a view of the ruins after the fire, showing a low smouldering heap, all that remained of the skyscraper.

When the *Ariel* had last landed, the photographer had made a close snap shot of pilot and assistant. The aeroplane, Dave, and Hiram were all clearly shown. The final picture was a view of thousands of persons waving hats and handkerchiefs in enthusiastic adieu to the machine disappearing over their heads.

"It's a smart fellow who did that story," declared Hiram. "Regular poet, too. 'Nervy young aviator,' 'heroic lone figure of the handsome young fellow who ran the risk of his life to save a poor frenzied girl.' Hum! I'll have to look out if I'm in that list. How they learned who we were, and got your whole history, Dave, shows positive genius."

"We were not interviewed," responded the young airman, "so I suppose they naturally traced us here, and got their information from the manager. It makes quite a pleasant thrill, to see ourselves pictured as doing some good in the world; doesn't it?"

"I know some folks who didn't have any pleasing thrills over the affair," remarked Hiram.

"Who is that?" questioned his chum.

"The Syndicate crowd. I came past there from the restaurant. One of them had a morning paper. Valdec saw me and scowled. Worthington looked up, and I saw his lips move as if he were wishing us up at Halifax. They don't wish us any good luck I'm sure. But at headquarters the manager was delighted. He came up to me when I was eating breakfast, clapped me on the shoulder and smiled all over. 'Tell Dashaway he's given the meet a capital advertisement,' he said. You see, it mentions that you will be one of the contestants in the International, Dave."

Hiram was in good humor over the event. He whistled and sang in his routine work about the hangar. Dave was his friend and he was proud of him, and not for a moment doubted that he would "scoop up every prize in sight," as he expressed it. When his chum sent him after some frame tape, down to the supply depot on the grounds, Hiram purposely took a detour by way of the Syndicate camp.

"Guess I've got a bad streak in me somewhere," he chuckled, "for it sort of satisfies me to think we're making that crowd wriggle. Hello—well, never! Oh, say, hello!"

Hiram walked on with sudden activity. He was passing the central hangar of the Syndicate people,

when he noticed a man twenty feet ahead of him. This individual chanced to turn his face sideways. In an instant Hiram recognized him, and the youth came to a sudden stop for he ran squarely into the man.

"Mr. Borden!" Hiram cried. "Say, I'm awful glad——"

"Hush!" came the caution.

It was the tramp artist. He was now neatly dressed. The frowsiness he had shown at the Midlothian grounds was gone, and he seemed prosperous. As he evidently in turn recognized his friend of the past, a glad gleam came over his face, and then he became flustered. He seized Hiram by the arm, turned his back to the people near the hangar, and whispered quickly:

"Not a word! No names! Act out what I start in on." And then in a tone of affected ferocity he gave Hiram a vigorous shake. "Who are you running into, clumsy!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Get away from here, and stay away!"

He gave Hiram a swing and a push. For only a moment was the latter bewildered. Then he was almost stunned. Amid the jeers of the Syndicate crowd near the hangars he went spinning almost twenty feet, stumbled and slid flat on the ground for a yard or two.

"I'll get even with you!" he yelled at Borden,

shaking his fist at him, affecting a boylike rage at his mistreatment, and then setting off on a run as his pretended assailant made a feint of pursuing. "Oh, say," continued Hiram to himself, "Dave must know about this right away. 'Acting,' Borden called it. Good! Great! I see through it now!"

Hiram forgot about his errand for the time being. He was a quiet thinker, and he fancied he had made a big discovery. He rushed in on his chum, flustered, perspiring and gasping for breath.

"Dave," he almost shouted, "that man—the tramp down at the Midlothian—you know—"

"Yes," answered his chum, "Mr. Borden—what about him?"

"He's here! He's with the Syndicate crowd. I saw him. Listen," and the words piled over each other recklessly as he recited his recent adventure. "Now what do you think of that? Plain as the nose on your face. 'Acting,' see? I took him unawares. He's playing a part—for our benefit!"

"I believe you're right," agreed Dave thoughtfully. "It looks that way, anyhow. I don't know why he should be so interested in our affairs and go to a lot of trouble to help us——"

"I do," pronounced Hiram energetically. "I saw more of him than you did. He's no ordinary tramp. You treated him like a gentleman and he

appreciated it. You have a way of making everybody like you, Dave."

"Thank you," answered the young aviator, "but how about Valdec and the Syndicate outfit, Hiram?"

"I meant everybody good," corrected Hiram. "That proves my argument. Borden is good. He shows it, good all over and all the way through. I think he has some track of the fellow whose picture he drew and that the trail led him straight to the meet here. Don't you see? Vincent is in with Worthington and his crowd and Borden has found it out."

Dave did not reply to the suggestion, but in his own mind he secretly sided with the views of his imaginative assistant. From the manner in which Borden had just acted, it would seem that his being with the Syndicate crowd was no accidental connection. If its motive lay in a friendly move on behalf of the airship chums, it was certain that the tramp artist had discovered something of value.

"If things are as you say," spoke Dave, "we will be sure to hear from Borden in some way before long. It is evident that he does not want us to recognize him as a friend. That being so, he will act with caution in getting word to us."

"You'll find out I'm guessing right," asserted Hiram, "you'll find out that this Vernon, out of

revenge, and because he's paid, is working for Valdec to get us out of the contest."

Hiram was much excited the rest of that day, expecting word from Borden, which did not come. The episode of the morning had somewhat disturbed Dave. If there was a systematic plot on foot to keep the Ariel out of the lists, extreme vigilance was necessary.

The management had a night patrol, but more to look after things in general than each individual hangar. Dave had known one Dennis Rohan at a former meet he had attended, a man who traveled about selling favors and souvenirs. He was an old man with one limb, crippled, not very active in getting about, but sober and reliable. Until the meet opened he had nothing particular to do. Dave sought him out. He arranged that Rohan was to act as watchman of the hangar, coming on duty at dusk, and remaining until daylight.

The usual practice of the day was gone through that afternoon. Hiram showed a good deal of restlessness, however. Just before supper Dave came up to him where he sat on a bench near the hangar looking in the direction of the Syndicate camp.

"See here, Hiram," spoke the young aviator, "you're letting this Borden affair get on your nerves, and it won't do. I'm looking out for tricks, and things will develop of themselves. Get your

mind in a new rut. What do you say to a flight out over the lake? It will be moonlight shortly after dark and the air spin will make us sleep soundly."

"That suits me," proclaimed Hiram, his usual animation restored—"you mean in the *Ariel*?"

"Why, just as you choose. If you want to take the *Scout*, it will give you fine practice."

"That will be fine," said Hiram, and just at dusk, after their evening meal, he ran the *Scout* out of the hangar near the high fence surrounding the grounds, and busied himself seeing that the machine was in perfect trim for the flight.

Dave was similarly employed with the *Ariel*, inside the hangar. He was ready to start out, but glancing at his watch and discovering that Rohan would be due on his night duty within a few minutes, he decided to await his arrival to give him some instructions.

"She's in prime trim," voiced his young assistant outside, as he climbed into the pilot seat and ran his hand over the various wheels, levers and buttons, to see that everything was in order. "Why doesn't Dave come?" and he was about to give a customary signal whistle when he exclaimed with a start! Hello! what's that, now?"

It was a shot, just outside the fence, and it was followed by shouts. Then there was a scraping sound on the surface of the outside of the boards.

"I declare!" cried Hiram, as a human head bobbed into view over the top of the fence. There was another shot. "Hi, you! what's up?" challenged Hiram.

In a great hurry, the owner of the head pulled himself into view. He dropped to the inside, stumbled, recovered himself and then glared all about him. His glance lit on the machine and then on its pilot.

Whoever he was, whatever his purposes, the sight of the outfit seemed suddenly to infuse him with an idea. He gave the machine a push, sent it spinning ahead, ran around to its side and leaping up began climbing over the planes.

"Here! here!" shouted the astonished Hiram, "get off there. You'll smash things."

"Start her up," ordered the intruder, "do it quick, without a word, or—"

The speaker must have known something about flying machines, for with a dexterous move he landed in the cockpit. As he did so, he completed his menacing words by holding a pistol close to the head of the startled Hiram Dobbs.

CHAPTER XI

A STRANGE RACE

DAVE, busying himself about the *Ariel* inside the hangar, had caught an echo of the shot outside the fence and the shouts accompanying it. There was generally considerable commotion about the grounds, however, and he paid no particular attention to these demonstrations.

Even the sound of the exhaust of the *Scout* did not suggest anything out of the ordinary. It was only when a loud cry sounded directly beyond the open doors of the hangar, that the young airman was aroused.

"Oh, Mr. Dashaway!" gasped out a startling voice—"come here! come, quick!"

Dave looked up to discern Rohan, his newly employed watchman. The latter was limping towards the hangar. The light from the inside shone on his face, showing excitement, and a sort of terror.

"Why, Dennis, what is the matter?" inquired Dave, anxiously.

"Your partner, Dobbs—the *Scout!*" stammered

the watchman, so excited that he could scarcely speak. "Hear it? See it? And here are the police!"

Dave hurried out. His first swift glance showed that the *Scout* was nowhere near. The gathering lake haze formed its usual veil between the ground lights and the upper clear area. A look in that direction told nothing.

A crackling, tearing sound next directed Dave's glance. It proceeded from the fence. There the uniformed figure of a man was to be seen. He came through a two-foot gap in the barrier. A companion on the outside was just tearing loose a third board. He was pulling it from the bottom, and did not release the top nails. He sprang through after his mate.

"Where is he?" demanded the latter of Dave, and just then Rohan came limping up to the spot.

"Tall man, wearing a buttoned-up frock coat?" he announced in jerks.

"With a fortune in it, yes!" responded the police officer, quickly. "Where is he?" followed the sharp challenge.

"Up there," answered the watchman promply, and he pointed aloft.

"Eh, what? Trying to guy us!"

"No, sir," answered Dennis. "He's gone, and he's gone in the little airship. I saw him!"

"Well, I'm flabbergasted!" puffed the officer. "Mate, he's slipped us. I wish we'd got another shot at him. You mean the fellow has sailed away in one of these balloons around here?"

"I saw him," continued the watchman rapidly, with a glow of excitement in his eyes. "He dropped to the ground. Mr. Dashaway's partner here had just got into his machine. The fellow you're after ran for it. He gave it a shove, jumped onto a side plane, crawled right up to young Dobbs, and put a pistol to his head!"

Dave started. The thought of his chum in peril set his wits at work in an instant.

"The man made some threat to Dobbs," went on Dennis. "Anyhow, up went the biplane. Then, as the fellow dropped into the cockpit, I heard him yell, 'West—straight west.'"

"You did?" spoke Dave, questioningly. "That's a point," and he made a dash for the hangar. The officers were, indeed, "flabbergasted." They stood like dummies, dismayed and at a loss as to further action. Dave ran the *Ariel* out into the field.

"Officer," he called to the policeman who seemed most to direct affairs, "that man—who is he?"

"Reddy Marsh, the slickest diamond thief in America," came the response.

"And he's got a load of the sparklers in his coat right now," added the other officer. "Padded

brick, smashed a lighted show-window in a jewelry store and off he was with a case, with stones in it worth fifty thousand dollars. We thought we'd run him down when he made for the fence."

"Yes," put in the other policeman, who was staring overhead in a lost, puzzled way, "and it won't be a question of hundreds, but of thousands to the person who gets him and his booty."

"I'm not thinking of that," said Dave in an anxious way, "but of my friend. He's clear grit, but the man is armed. Officer, I'm going aloft. If the *Scout* hasn't got too far away, I may catch sight of it. I may need protection; assistance. One of you come with me."

"Hey!" exclaimed the head officer—"you mean in that airship?"

"It's the only way, isn't it?" propounded Dave.

"I'll go," spoke up the other officer. "This lad must know his business or he wouldn't be here. It's in my line of duty—besides, there may be glory in it, and a reward. Go ahead!"

"Quick, then!" directed the young aviator. "Now then," as he guided the unusual passenger to the seat behind the pilot post, "buckle on the straps, keep cool and quiet, and I'll see what can be done."

He liked the obedient composure of his passenger. If the latter felt that he was taking a risk, and ex-

perienced a little natural dread, he masked it by shouting to his comrade:

"Tell the sergeant I'm off on special duty—joined the airship corps—ha! ha!"

His laugh ended, however, and Dave could catch a series of quivers and sharp short gasps as the watchman gave the ground gear an impetus and the *Ariel* rose up majestically. The machine pierced the blanket of haze and came up above the lower strata of obscuring ground air. Dave described a slow broad circle. His eye swept in all directions the level they were on.

"If the moon were only up," he murmured. "Well, the only course is west. Hiram is shrewd and intelligent. If he guesses for a moment that I am after him, soon as he gets his thinking cap on he will find some way to signal, or get the best of his passenger."

"Don't see anything," observed the officer, and, big, brave fellow that he was, there was the tremor of the novice in air evident in his voice.

"They've got a start, you must remember," explained Dave, "and a big field. We can only go on, keeping a sharp lookout. If you should happen to get sight of a black speck against the stars, tell me."

There was a spell of silence for some minutes after that, Dave paying strict attention to directing

the machine, his passenger keeping as keen a look-out as was possible for him under the unfamiliar conditions. Suddenly the officer shouted out:

"There! See, a little way ahead? No, it's gone. Now, again! Pshaw!—fireflies."

"Too high for that," spoke Dave, "I see what you mean. Thanks my friend, this is important!"

Ahead of them, and on a higher level, there was now visible a series of swiftly-vibrating brilliant sparks. They filled a mere tiny spot in space. To the expert young airman they were guiding. Dave set the machine on a swift drift then climbed up several hundred feet. Now the sparks, intermittent but perfectly distinct, were clearer and nearer the faster they went.

"It's a machine," soliloquized Dave, "and it must be the *Scout*. If it is—clever Hiram! He doesn't dare show the lights, for that man aboard wouldn't let him. I can guess what he has done—the vibrator."

Dave, with a perfect knowledge of all the parts and possibilities of the natty little *Scout,* was at home with every detail of the mechanism of the machine, and guessed what was transpiring. Later on his surmises were verified. The young aviation expert decided that his chum counted on his searching for him. He had loosed the top of the vibrator, probably sending it adrift.

If he awakened the suspicion of the passenger, he could readily make a pretence of watching the sparks jumping from one coil to the other, to see that all the cylinders were working right. Correct or not in his guess, those distant electric points of light were now a direct guide to the eager pilot of the *Ariel*.

"We're getting nearer," breathed the man behind him. "You think it's the airship we're after?"

"I am pretty sure of it," responded Dave. "It's a race, now, officer. This machine can overtake the *Scout* and outdistance it within the next half hour. Then the case is up to you."

"Just get me in reach of Reddy Marsh," spoke the policeman, "and I'll do the rest."

CHAPTER XII

A DESPERATE PASSENGER

"DUE west—and no tricks!" the man had ordered who had insisted upon being a free passenger aboard the *Scout*.

Hiram Dobbs was not frightened. He was simply startled. Most boys would have been unnerved at the leveled weapon of a man who looked, so very dangerous. Momentarily taken off his balance, the young airman obeyed the menacing mandate given.

"In case you should think of cutting up any capers," was spoken next into his ear, "let me tell you I am a desperate man."

It was humiliating to Hiram, now he had got his second breath, to submit to the dictation of a stranger, and he an intruder, too. Hiram's natural disposition urged him instantly to drive the machine back to earth. Then common sense assured him that it would be at a risk. He really believed his passenger would shoot. Hiram was a quick thinker. He summed up the situation this way: the fellow

aboard the *Scout* was a criminal, a fugitive pursued by the police. His only way of evading them was by the air route. A spice of reckless love of excitement came into the thoughts of Hiram. His passenger was watching him closely.

"All right, I'll see the end of the adventure," resolved Hiram, and the next minute the land mist shut out all further view of the International grounds.

"Those officers will never take me alive again," spoke his passenger. "If they get the two of us it will be two dead ones, mind you, that."

"My! but you're a wicked one, aren't you now?" observed Hiram in a tone of raillery.

"Don't you talk too bold, youngster—it mightn't be healthy for you," growled the other. "You obey my orders and you shan't want a reward."

"I don't want money for helping a criminal to escape," retorted Hiram spicily—"which I take you to be."

"We all have our special business to attend to," coolly announced the man. "Yours is running an airship. Mine is picking up what careless people don't watch close enough. We'll both be in the papers to-morrow. It will make a good story, on your part. That will help, you see?"

Hiram, as he later explained it to his chum, was "mad all over," but he saw no safe way out of the

dilemma. He preserved a stubborn silence, but thought steadily.

"If I know anything about Dave's ways," he soliloquized, "he won't let any grass grow under his feet. He'll think and act. A man ran up as this fellow aboard here pushed up the machine. I think it was Dennis, the watchman. The police broke in through the fence, too. Oh, yes, Dave will soon be aloft, and looking for me."

So convinced of this was Hiram, that he immediately put in operation a plan suddenly suggested to his mind. He reached out one hand and began loosening the screws that held in place the plate covering the vibrator. His passenger was alive to every move he made and was watching him intently.

"Hey, what you up to?" he snarled and then, as if through accident, Hiram shifted the plate so that it went whirling down through space, leaving the mechanism of the vibrator entirely exposed.

"I guess I've got to see if the cylinders are sparking right; haven't I?" snapped Hiram.

"I don't like that game!" growled the man behind him.

"Say," jeered Hiram impatiently, "if you don't take to my way of running this machine, suppose we change places?"

"Oh, of course, I'm no sky pilot"—began the other.

"Then allow me to run this biplane in my own fashion. You'll have to, I guess," added Hiram, "or drop. You may be desperate, but I'm in no very good humor myself, drifting around to suit your fancy, and you'll leave me alone, if you're wise."

The passenger relapsed into silence now. Probably a realization of the fact that he might unnerve the pilot, or actually drive him to some rash action, caused him to assume a less forceful attitude. They must have gone fully thirty miles before Hiram spoke again.

"See here," he demanded sharply, "how long is this flight going to keep up?"

"The further the better," was the indefinite response. "You know what I'm after—to get us far and fast as possible from the people I don't want to see. Hey—what's that?"

Hiram uttered a quick cry of joy. Of a sudden a swaying flash of light moved over and beyond them. A radiant, searching pencil of brilliancy wavered and dilated.

"It's a biplane searchlight," thought Hiram, holding his nerves as steady as he could, and not daring to look behind him. "It's the *Ariel*—it's Dave!"

"Say, what's that now?" muttered his passenger, fidgeting about and straining his neck.

"It's an airship, like our own," replied Hiram.

"They're chasing us!" exclaimed the man.

"I can't help that," retorted Hiram, coolly.

"Well, aren't they?" persisted the passenger. "See! they've got us in their focus, and they're keeping us there. You take a look and see if that isn't so."

Hiram ventured a glance backwards. It was swift and fleeting. It persuaded him that he was not wrong as to the identity of the biplane.

"There are so many craft around here," he said, "that one might be a trailer, or setting a pace, or trying to dazzle and play with us, or half-a-dozen such things."

"Oh, they're after us—I feel it—I know it!" declared the passenger anxiously. "How far are they from us, do you think?"

"Perhaps a mile, perhaps two," answered Hiram grudgingly.

He could catch low mutterings, as though the perturbed passenger were communing with himself. Then the latter poked him on the arm.

"They're getting nearer, and they're after us," he spoke quickly, and with a queer thrill of excitement in his voice. "See here, young fellow, I've got no money with me, but I've got what is worth money. Give me your name, and I promise you, if you help me to get away from whoever may be after

me, I'll send you something, as soon as I realize, that will pretty nearly make you rich."

"I wouldn't take it," declared the young pilot of the *Scout*. "You must be up to something bad, talking and acting as you do."

"Land—land!" suddenly shouted the passenger. "Where you see that rise. Do it, don't you delay, or I'll knock you over, and risk running the machine myself!"

The urgency of the speaker was caused through the direct play of the headlight of the *Ariel* upon them. Dave had gained on the *Scout* materially within a very few minutes' time. In truth, Hiram, understanding the situation, had been "playing" with the *Scout,* purposely deferring direct forward progress, bent on giving the *Ariel* an opportunity to come up with them. His passenger either discovered or suspected this now.

"No fooling, youngster," he spoke sternly, and Hiram felt against his shoulder the pressure of the weapon with which the man had previously threatened him. He knew that his passenger was watching him as a cat would a mouse. He could think of no subterfuge to delay matters. Hiram chuckled, however, as he noticed the ever increasing nearness of the *Ariel.*

"Right over on that hill—where the grove of

trees is," directed his passenger. "We can make it first. No delaying, now! I won't stand it!"

The searchlight of the *Ariel* was kept directly upon the *Scout,* except when a curve, or turn, made this impossible. As Hiram started a drift landwards, he realized that the *Ariel* was not far behind in the race.

His passenger had slipped loose the seat belt, and showed eager suspense.

"Why don't you land—why don't you land! those fellows will be right on our heels in a minute," he shouted.

"I can't drop into the tree tops, can I?" challenged Hiram—"well!"

The rebound of the biplane told him that it had been lightened of a burden. His environment demanded his strictest attention to the machine. However, he shot one rapid look back and down. It was to see his passenger risking a ten foot drop directly into a nest of tree branches. They bent with him like a rubbery surface. Hiram sent the *Scout* in a rising circle so as to keep the man in view.

The headlight of the *Ariel* had kept pace with his sensational movements. The man soon reached the ground, dropping recklessly from branch to branch. The arrow of light revealed him running towards a thick copse. Then it lost sight of him. A minute

later, however, the dazzling glare took up the trail again. The fugitive had darted into a thicket, out of it, into another, out of that one, and the last Hiram saw of him he was dashing down the edge of a gully.

The *Ariel,* fast descending, kept its boring eye of radiance squarely upon the man. Hiram fancied he could guess about where it would land and decided to join its company. Then something happened that thrilled Hiram. The fugitive stumbled and went headlong over the edge of the gulch.

CHAPTER XIII

A REMARKABLE EXPLANATION

THE *Ariel* had found a landing place where some short crisp grass covered a spot bare of trees and rocks. Hiram brought the *Scout* to a halt not twenty feet away. He shut off the power, leaped out and approached Dave. The latter stood by the side of his machine watching the police officer who had run to the edge of the gully.

"Dave, this has been a startler; hasn't it?" exclaimed Hiram.

"You are one of the wisest boys in the world," spoke the young airman. "Without that spark signal we should never have got a start on your trail."

"Has it done any good, after all?" questioned Hiram. "My passenger has got into deeper trouble; hasn't he?"

"It looks that way," answered Dave. "We saw him stumble over that ledge yonder."

"Maybe it was a trick," suggested Hiram "He's a bad one, I can tell you."

"Here comes the policeman. Any trace of him, officer?"

The recent passenger of the *Ariel* looked serious. He held in his hand a dark lantern, the rays of which, the others had noticed, he had been flashing over the edge of the gully.

"Got a rope?" he asked.

"I have one, in the *Scout*. Always carry it," volunteered Hiram briskly and he ran to his machine and returned with the coil in question.

"The fellow won't run any further away from us this time," advised the policeman. "He's lying on a shelf of rock about twelve feet down. Both of you can help me."

The boys followed him. They took a look over the edge of the gully as their leader flashed his lantern down. There, plainly visible, was the recent passenger of the *Scout*.

"He's insensible, or dead," spoke the officer in a callous, professional tone. "He must have landed head first. We must get him up here. I want a look at those sparklers."

The man's word grated harshly on both Dave and Hiram. They proceeded, however, to follow the directions of the officer. The rope was not heavy, but was very strong, being reinforced with strands of flexible wire.

It took them nearly fifteen minutes to lower the

policeman and hoist, first the injured man and then the officer, to the surface. As the fugitive lay extended motionless upon the grass the officer inspected him with the aid of the dark lantern.

"None of his limbs seem broken," he reported, "but he got a terrific crack on his head. I've seen a good many cases of such hurts, and I guess this fellow has run his last race."

"Can't we do something for him?" asked Dave solicitously.

"Say," broke in Hiram, "I see the lights of a settlement over to the west there. It can't be more than a mile away."

"You had better reach it, then," suggested Dave.

"Yes, and get them to send a wagon, or an ambulance, for this man," added the policeman.

Dave helped his assistant get the *Scout* off the ground, its pilot marking with his eye closely the main points in the landscape. Thus he would be able to pretty accurately direct those who came after the injured man. The minute the officer was satisfied that nothing could be done to add to the comfort or safety of their charge until aid arrived, he proceeded to examine the pockets of his insensible prisoner.

The young aeronaut considered this rather a heartless proceeding, but realized that the officer was acting in pursuance of his duty. Twice he went

over every pocket and possible secret hiding place in the clothing of the fugitive. He finally arose to his feet with a baffled and angry expression of face.

"He's beat us!" he growled. "I fancied he was getting away with his booty—but it was getting away from me and my partner that he was after."

"But what has become of the diamonds you spoke about?" queried Dave.

"Got rid of them to some partner, I suppose, before we finally ran him down," was the explanation. "It's too bad to miss the big reward that we'd have got."

Hiram returned in half an hour. He had made a brief and rapid trip.

"A sheriff and his men will soon be here with an auto," he reported, and a very few minutes after that the machine in question halted near the spot. A surgeon had accompanied the village officers. He shook his head as he looked over his patient.

"He won't live the night out," he announced with professional certainty. "Concussion of the brain, and a very serious case."

The city policeman accompanied the auto back to the village. Before he did so, however, he wrote something on a card and handed it to Dave.

"If you will take that card, and your bill for the

clever work you've done, to police headquarters, they'll treat you right," he said.

"Queer about those diamonds, isn't it, Dave?" spoke Hiram as they found themselves alone with their machines. "Maybe the man dropped them in running, or they went over into that gully."

"It would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack to try and find them," declared the young airman.

Excitement and trying work at the wheel had worn them out considerably, and they were glad when they crept into their beds at headquarters an hour later. Hiram overslept himself. He awoke late the next morning, in the room they occupied jointly at the grounds clubhouse, to find his chum missing. He hurried his breakfast and was soon at the hangar. As he neared it he noticed some one seated on a stool inside it. Dave had the *Ariel* outside and was tanking up with "juice," as they called the gasoline.

"Some one to see you, Hiram," he announced, nodding his head towards the garage.

"Who is it?" asked his mate curiously.

"He didn't give his name, but he's a boy. Says he knows you."

"Is that so?" returned Hiram musingly, and advanced towards the garage. Then his face expanded in a welcoming good natured way. A lad

about his own age was seated with his back to the door and seemed to be eagerly inspecting the little *Scout* and the mechanical accessories belonging to it. "Why, Bruce Beresford, hello!" Hiram shouted suddenly.

"Eh—oh, excuse me, yes, it's me," answered the visitor, springing up with a nervous start, and his anxious face brightened as Hiram gave his hand a friendly shake.

Hiram drew back a step or two, and with apparent admiration looked over in a quizzical way the lad he had so signally befriended in the past.

"Well," he observed, "you're looking more prosperous than when I last saw you."

"Oh, yes," replied Bruce Beresford, his whole face lighting up. "I've had such wonderful luck!"

"You look it, and I'm glad," said Hiram. His friend of the swampy island certainly showed a great improvement, with good shoes on his feet, and wearing a neat suit of clothes. When Hiram had first met him Bruce had worn a big cap pulled closely down over his ears, clear to the nape of his neck. Just now, too, Hiram observed that his head back of his cheeks was well covered up. It gave Bruce a rather uncouth appearance and the young pilot of the Scout wondered why.

"I hope I'm not acting as if I was imposing on

you, coming in on you in this way, and so soon," began Bruce.

"Didn't I invite you to do just that?" challenged Hiram.

"I know, but it looks sort of—well, cheeky, following you up when I owe so much to you as it is."

"Don't bother about that," advised Hiram. "Tell me about that luck of yours. I'll be interested."

"Well, you know how I got little Lois comfortably settled at that children's home at Benham. Then I started in to work. It was surprising how many little odd jobs a fellow can pick up who tries. I was just delighted, until the second day of my work when I happened to see a newspaper from Hillsboro—that is the town where Martin Dawson, the man who abused us so terribly, lives. There, in the paper, was an advertisement offering a reward for a runaway boy."

"Meaning yourself, I suppose?" questioned Hiram.

"No one else. It scared me, I tell you, because—because," and the speaker flushed up, and Hiram noticed that he ran his hand over the back of his head in a conscious sort of a way and seemed embarrassed. "Well, because there was a very good description of how I looked," was added in a quick short breath.

"Thought they'd be after you, eh?" asked Hiram.

"I knew they would and that I wasn't safe in that section," proceeded Bruce. "I felt sure that sooner or later some one would suspect or identify me. It wasn't safe for my sister. I didn't know what to do, for what little I had earned wouldn't take us far. Then came my big luck," and the face of the speaker became radiant.

"Tell it," directed Hiram, on the edge with curiosity.

"Some one had stolen an automobile from the village banker," went on Bruce. "I had heard of it. I had read the posters giving the number and make of the machine, and offering a hundred dollars as a reward for its recovery. Just think of it! that very day an invalid lady I had chopped some wood for, asked me if I could get her a bunch of water lilies. I made a few inquiries of some boys I met. They directed me to a swamp about two miles from the town. I found a fine bed of the lilies, and was wading out with an armful, when down among a nest of reeds, where it had been run by the ride-stealers was the missing automobile."

"That was fine," remarked Hiram. "I guess you got back to town on the double quick."

"I did for a fact," agreed Bruce. "And inside of two hours I had the reward in my pocket. Oh

but I felt rich! I went to the matron of the home and told her my whole story for the first time. She not only thought I had better get Lois to some safer place, and further away from Hillshore, but gave me a letter to a relative living on a farm near Chicago. I got some new clothing for my sister and myself, left Lois with the kind hearted lady who was only too glad to take her in at two dollars a week, and her help around the house, and hunted down the address you gave me. You see—you see," concluded Bruce longingly, "I wanted advice."

"What about?" inquired Hiram.

"Well I've got over fifty dollars to invest. There's a good deal moving around this place. You spoke of a friend, a Mr. Dashaway, and I thought——"

"Yes, that's my chum, Dave," interrupted Hiram proudly,—"the most level headed fellow who ever lived. Dave!"

Hiram called his chum and there was an introduction. An explanation followed. The pilot of the *Ariel* soon had a knowledge of all the circumstances of the case. He and Hiram had seated themselves on a bench opposite their guest. It was warm weather and both threw off their caps. Bruce hesitated and then followed their example, but in an awkward and confused way.

"Why," exclaimed Hiram with a start, as he

noticed that under his cap their visitor wore a close fitting skull cap—"what's that for?"

Bruce Beresford fidgeted. He seemed at a loss for an explanation. Then he scanned the friendly face of Dave, and the good natured one of his assistant.

"Well, it's my ears," he said, slowly, evidently embarrassed.

"Your ears; what about them?" asked Dave, curiously.

"They've been cut," explained the orphan. "And they're not healed yet. I keep them covered up to keep out the germs the doctor said were floating in the air. But they're getting better now."

He took off the skull cap and showed where both ears presented a red surface.

"How in the world did that happen?" asked Hiram. "Have you been playing football?"

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW HELPER

BRUCE replaced the cap back over his injured ears and smiled at his two friends.

"No, not exactly football," he replied. "It was worse than that."

"Whew!" whistled Dave. "You must have been 'up against it,' as Borden would say."

"Up against a grindstone; yes," assented Hiram. "Go ahead, Bruce, and let's hear about it."

"It's a long story about how my father died, and how Martin Dawson got hold of his estate," began the homeless orphan. "I'll tell you all the particulars of that some time, and maybe you can advise me, and help us to get our rights. Old Martin Dawson has treated me meanly. He hired me out to all kinds of hard work, and half-starved me, and kept me in rags. As I told Hiram when I first met him, Mr. Dawson had a regular set of bad men around him. They were all rough characters. There was one fellow who traveled with circus shows. His name was Wertz. It was about two

years ago when Mr. Dawson farmed me out to him. Wertz tried to train me for the trapeze, but I wasn't limber enough for that. Then he said he would use me in his knife-throwing act. He made me stand against a wooden shield while he threw knives at me. I've got two bad scars on my body now, where he missed, and the knives cut into me. Then one day when practicing he clipped off a little piece of my right ear. I ran away from him then, but he got me back. I made him agree that after that he wouldn't aim at my head, only my arms and the rest of my body. One night at a circus, though, he got reckless. He aimed at my ear—the left one—intending to set a circle of knives all around my head. One clipped my other ear, as you have seen. It hurt dreadfully, and I fainted away. The audience was roused up about it, and the humane society got after Wertz and he ran away. Then I went back to Mr. Dawson. " A doctor fixed up my ears, but they are not quite healed yet."

This story aroused the sympathy and interest of Dave, and he decided to employ Bruce. The watchman, Dennis, was called away by a partner to a country fair and Bruce was installed as watchman in his place. The young airman knew he could trust him and he found Bruce willing and grateful.

" You see," proceeded Hiram, " it's only six days

to the meet. Monday the contests begin, and we want to get everything in ship-shape order."

"That is true," agreed Dave. "What is it you have to suggest, Hiram?"

The latter drew from his pocket a double printed sheet and handed it to Dave.

"I got one of the first programmes," explained Hiram.

Dave scanned it casually. He had been informed in advance, as had most of the entrants, of the nature of the various contests. Towards the last, however, something new and unexpected met his glance.

"'Mail delivered—twenty stations, minimum altitude two hundred feet'—what does that mean?" and he looked keenly at his assistant as the latter began to laugh and chuckle.

"That, Dave," answered Hiram with a great deal of satisfaction, and some pride—"that means me."

"Oh!" observed quick-witted Dave, thinking back, and guessing hard, "those leather bags——"

"You've hit it," acquiesced Hiram. "The idea came to me while we were practicing at the Midlothian field. I reckoned it wouldn't be hard to work up the management to including a mail delivery feature in the programme, so I set to practicing. And I've been at it on the sly ever since," added the speaker with a laugh.

"Go ahead, Hiram," encouraged Dave. "You don't usually stop half way, and you have got more than that to tell."

"Why, yes, I have," admitted Hiram. "When I was a boy—I mean a real little fellow—I was always good at pitching quoits, and such things. I was the local champion at 'Duck on the Rock.' I saw an article in the newspapers discussing the idea of establishing an airship route to deliver mail bags. I practiced. First, Dave, I was going to tell you, and have you work up the idea. Then I thought how busy you were and—well, I'll wager you I can win the twenty point score on the mail feature over anybody in the contest."

"Well; twenty points isn't to be sneezed at," commented Dave briskly. "It may be a saving clause for us."

"I suggested that programme number to the management," went on Hiram. "I showed them the newspaper article about it. Now of course a lot of fellows will be getting in trim for it, but don't forget that I have had three weeks' practice ahead of them. Oh, Dave, I forgot till now—another thing: I met the policeman you took in the *Ariel* after that diamond robber."

"What did he say, Hiram?"

"The man died without coming back to consciousness. Those diamonds will never be found

now, unless they locate the partner he passed them to."

"Have you seen anything of Borden lately?" asked Dave.

"I've seen him, in fact I've passed right by him at the Syndicate camp half a dozen times, but he turns away, or scowls at me. It's part of his 'acting' you know. He isn't ready to report to us yet, but I know he will when he is ready to do us some good."

Dave went away alone an hour later for a flight with the *Ariel* over the sand dunes.

"It's a good time to clean house," suggested Dave to Hiram, before leaving, and the latter and Bruce, following his orders, cleared out a lot of rubbish that obstructed the garage space. This they proceeded to burn up.

"Here's a box with a lot of catalogues, and some papers in it," said Bruce, lifting the article from the top of a barrel.

"Dump them into the fire," ordered Hiram.

"Maybe they are some good," suggested Bruce, looking over the litter, and then he uttered so strange a cry that Hiram regarded him curiously.

Bruce had taken from the box and unrolled a sheet of manilla paper. It was the one which bore the crayon portrait of the man who had tried to

blow up the two airships at the Midlothian grounds.

"Hiram," spoke Bruce in a quick troubled tone, "where did you get this? I know that man!"

"You do!" exclaimed Hiram, pressing closely to his side. "Who is he?"

"It's the man I told you about—the knife-thrower, Wertz," was Bruce Beresford's reply.

CHAPTER XV

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY

"ARE you sure, Bruce?" challenged Hiram. "You are not mistaken?"

"In that man?" cried his companion, and his face was pale, and his voice was trembling. "Oh, no! it makes me shudder to even look at his picture. Where did you get it?"

"Well, Bruce," explained Hiram, "that is the man you heard Dave and myself talking about."

"You mean the one who tried to blow up your machine?"

"That's him; yes," answered Hiram. "But, say, I thought he was hanging around with that old fellow, your guardian?"

"He was," replied Bruce. "You see, he came and went. About two weeks ago I was in dread when Wertz showed up. I imagined he'd be putting me into some new circus training or other. I was afraid he might get it into his head to take Lois away, and train her to ride a horse bareback, or jump through a blazing hoop, or some other trick.

I never was so relieved as when he went away again. He'd been waiting for some one to come, I heard. An old crony of his showed up finally, a man who used to come every few months to borrow money, 'to get staked,' as he called it; by Mr. Dawson. He was always planning schemes. Why, say," added Bruce with animation, "I never thought of it till this moment, but I remember now he was in the same line as you and Dave Dashaway."

"You mean the airship line?" asked Hiram.

"That's it. I recollect how he used to brag of the big flights he made, and the money he got, and the tricks he played."

"Who was he—what was his name?" inquired Hiram.

"Vernon."

Hiram Dobbs grabbed the astonished Bruce by the arm with such fervor that the latter was startled.

"Look here, Bruce," he cried excitedly, "you don't know how important this is to us. Why, it connects up the whole scheme to put us out of business, and——"

Something else suddenly distracted Hiram's attention and he stopped short, his companion staring at him in wonderment.

"Hush! This way, and easy!" a breathless voice had spoken, and a face appeared around the end of the hangar.

"Mr. Borden," whispered Hiram to himself, "stay here Bruce. It's a great friend of ours."

It was indeed the tramp-artist who had so unexpectedly appeared. As Hiram came around to the side of the hangar, shielded from the other camps of the field, he found Borden there, looking anxious, and glancing about him as if fearful of being observed by others.

"Quick, Dobbs," he spoke hurriedly, "where is Dashaway?"

"Dave isn't around. Did you want to see him? He's off on a practice flight."

"How long since?"

"About an hour ago."

Borden looked disappointed and dismayed. He rubbed his chin in perplexity. Then he asked:

"Do you know where he is?"

"I think I do," answered Hiram. "He usually goes to the sand dunes about thirty miles down the lake shore."

"Got your machine, the *Scout,* handy here?" asked Borden, with increasing urgency.

"Oh, yes—why, Mr. Borden?"

"Then don't delay a minute," directed the former tramp, earnestly. "Find Dashaway as speedily as you can. Tell him I came to you. Warn him to get back here, and stay close about the grounds for the

next day or two. There's danger! Don't neglect what I say."

With these last words Borden, with a nervous glance across the grounds, at some persons approaching, suddenly darted away from Hiram. In a quandary of doubt and dread, the latter stood for a moment or two watching his movements. Borden walked along near the fence and disappeared behind the next hangar. Then Hiram aroused himself into action. He ran back in front of their own hangar and rolled out the *Scout*.

"Bruce," he said hurriedly, "something's up that may mean trouble for Dave. I've got to go after him. Do you want to go with me?"

"I should say I did!" cried his companion eagerly. "Jump in," ordered Hiram. "Give us a lift," he called out to a passing guard. "Thanks. Now then, to find Dave!"

The manner and words of the young pilot of the *Scout* convinced Bruce that something was wrong. He asked no questions, however. As they got into full flight, due south, Hiram was the first to speak.

"You're our friend, Bruce," he called back over his shoulder, "and I know you're interested in anything concerning us or our business. The man who signaled me to the side of the hangar was the man who drew that picture of Wertz."

"And he's a friend of yours, too; isn't he?" inquired Bruce.

"I am sure that he is," responded Hiram. "He's acted like one just now, if what he told me is true. He has discovered some new plot against us and has sent me to warn Dave, and tell him to get back to the grounds right away, and stay there."

"I do hope nothing is wrong, and that you will be in time," remarked Bruce anxiously.

Hiram drove the *Scout* to its best paces. He was familiar with the route Dave usually took to reach the sand dunes. There was one especial reach of the sterile stretch which Dave had, so to speak, appropriated as his own private training grounds.

"We're nearly there," announced Hiram finally. "I don't see any trace of Dave or the *Ariel*, though."

"Maybe he went further—maybe he has returned home," suggested Bruce.

"We could hardly miss him," answered Hiram. "There's the spot where Dave usually descends," and he fixed his glance on a patch of stunted field poplars. "There's something lying on the ground. A man? No, a coat, I think," and the speaker strained his vision, and set the *Scout* on a sharp volplane.

He jumped out the moment the machine halted.

He ran to the spot where the object lay that had attracted his attention. Bruce followed his example and dashed after him.

"It's Dave's coat," declared Hiram, and he looked worried. "I can't understand it! The coat is torn and some of the buttons are off—see, on the sand there. He wouldn't leave it here. What can have become of him, and the machine?"

"There's a smell of burned wood, or smoke," here broke in Bruce, and following the scent he rounded the patch of brush and saplings. "Oh, Hiram!" he shouted. "Come here! Come here!"

The young pilot of the *Scout* reached the side of the staring Bruce to observe with distended eyes what his new friend had first discovered.

Upon the ground was a mass of charred and twisted wreckage. Only the metal parts of an airship remained. Hiram Dobbs recognized what was left of the buoyant *Ariel!*

CHAPTER XVI

IN DOUBT

HIRAM DOBBS sank down on the sand beside the wreck of the *Ariel* and tears came into his eyes. In a flash the truth dawned upon him. Vandal hands had destroyed the flying marvel upon which such hopes had been built. Dave had been tracked to the present spot and captured; perhaps hurt.

Bruce Beresford stood regarding his new friend, sharing his deep emotion. He rammed his hands into his pockets and clenched them, pacing about the spot to give Hiram time to regain his composure. Finally he walked up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

"Don't take on so, Hiram," he pleaded, "please don't. It may not be the *Ariel,* you know——"

"Not the *Ariel,*" cried Hiram, springing to his feet, his tears becoming angry tears now. "Think I wouldn't know the *Ariel* if I came across one spar, or rod of it in the desert of Sahara? The *Ariel?* Look there!"

The speaker pointed to a place in the blackened twisted mass near the pilot post. A silver plate there bore in script the name of the machine, date and maker. Blackened and abrased as it was Bruce was able to make out the inscription.

"It's too bad," he said sorrowfully. "Do you suppose something exploded and set it on fire?"

"No!" shouted Hiram wrathfully, now poking in among the debris. "I can smell kerosene. And there's the cinders of a bunch of cotton waste. The *Ariel* was set on fire! And—Dave!"

The thought of his missing friend roused the young pilot of the *Scout* as no other idea could have done. Bruce was glad to see Hiram come back to his old rushing, go-ahead self. Hiram went back to the coat they had at first discovered. He inspected it more closely this time.

"See, it's torn as if in a struggle, and the pockets are turned inside out," he said. "Oh, if we had only received the warning from Mr. Borden sooner! Dave is gone. The same persons who expected him here, and watched for him, have taken him away."

"But surely they would not dare to injure him," argued Bruce.

"Perhaps not, but don't you see that they have spoiled his whole future? They have put his biplane out of the way—they will keep Dave out of the way till the International meet is over."

"The crowd you told me about—the Syndicate people?" asked Bruce.

"Who else? What will Mr. Brackett say when he hears of this? How am I going to find out where they have taken Dave? Oh!" cried the excited lad, "I'm just half crazy over these doings! Wait here and watch the *Scout*. They'll be after that next," and Hiram sped away, after a sweeping glance in every direction.

He had made out a man with a rake covering the ruts in the straggly winding road that ran across the waste space. He came up with him and asked:

"Have you been here long?"

"All day, here and hereabouts," was the reply, as the worker rested on his rake and seemed glad to break the monotony of his task in that lonely spot by talking to some one.

"Did you notice an airship within the last hour or so?"

"I did," answered the old man. "It was over to the north yonder. It did some fancy whirls. I watched it a bit, then I went on with my work. They're getting common, those flyers."

"Have you seen anybody over near that clump of poplars?" and Hiram indicated the spot where he had left Bruce and the *Scout*.

"Why, yes, I did," answered the road-mender. "Thought it was sort of queer, too. It must have

been nigh onto two hours since, when three men, driving a covered wagon, drove off from the road here. They cut across in the direction you say. I wondered why, for the loose sand don't make easy going for a horse. The hummocks shut them out after a bit, and I thought no more of them until I noticed a lot of smoke near that patch of poplars. I then made up my mind they were campers, come down on a sand-crane hunt."

"Did you see them after that?" inquired Hiram eagerly.

"I did. Next thing I knew, the horse and wagon cut across back this way. They struck the road here, and went south, the same direction they had come from."

"Did you notice the men on the seat of the wagon?"

"They weren't near enough for that, and I'm sort of poor sighted as I get older," was the reply.

Hiram thanked the man, and hurried back to Bruce.

"I hope you have found out something," said the latter anxiously.

"Not much that is any good, I fear," replied Hiram. "We'll get back into the *Scout*. It's just as I guessed it, Bruce. I am satisfied that a covered wagon with three men in it took Dave away and that they went south."

The country lay under them like a map as they resumed the flight. Hiram followed the road as a guide. At the end of ten miles it ran into a junction of other diverging highways. So far they had not caught sight of any vehicle answering the description of the covered wagon.

They followed the main highway for some distance. Ahead they made out a large town. It was one of half a score dotting the landscape, and the location of large iron plants. As they neared it, and passed roads filled with all kinds of vehicles, and the great industrial beehive spread out for miles, Hiram gave up in despair.

"They've got a start of us, and have probably run to cover by this time," he said. "Oh, Bruce! I don't know what to do!"

Hiram was in deep distress. He realized that he, only a boy, had on his hands a task that might well baffle the shrewdest detective. A dozen impulses and plans came to his mind, but he rejected them all, fearing to cause complications.

"Indeed, I don't know what to do," he said to Bruce. "If I go to the management back at the grounds, they may cancel our entrant, and then Dave may show up. They will want some evidence besides my say so, and my suspicions, before they will be willing to accuse anybody of having a hand in the affair. If I charge that Syndicate mob boldly

with having a hand in the burning of the *Ariel,* it will put them more than ever on their guard, and they will hide Dave closer than ever. Oh, but I must do some tall thinking! Of course the very next thing is to get in touch with Mr. Brackett. We'll get back to the grounds right away."

An unexpected shower came up, and pilot, passenger and machine received quite a drenching. The rain had stopped by the time they reached the grounds. It made Bruce Beresford sad to watch the face of his friend. Hiram was like a rudderless boat, without Dave. The responsibilities suddenly thrust upon him seemed to stagger him. He was so harried, worried and flurried that he walked up and down before the hangar, so nervous and stirred up he could not keep still.

"It seems to me, Hiram," suggested Bruce, "that the best thing to do is to tell the management about the whole business. Surely they will do something to help you."

"I'm trying to think if it's best to do that," responded Hiram. "I'm trying to block out a way to act so I won't make any mistake. You don't know this game as well as I do. It isn't the first time this kind of a thing has happened to us. Let me alone for a bit, Bruce, till I get everything straightened out in my mind."

"Don't you bother about the *Scout*, Hiram. I'll clean up and get it into the hangar," said Bruce.

He rubbed the metal parts dry and shining and swept up the litter in the cockpit. A good deal of sand had gotten into this. He was pulling out the seat cushions, when something caught his finger, pricking it sharply. It was a metal point of some kind, and looking closer Bruce made out that it was a stick pin.

He picked this up, and as he did so noticed a second pin lying on the seat frame, hitherto concealed by the cushion. A quick flash of intelligence came into his mind. Quite roused up, Bruce shouted to his friend:

"Hiram, come here, I think I've made an important discovery!"

CHAPTER XVII

TROUBLE

It was hard for the young pilot of the *Scout* to set his mind upon anything outside of his missing chum. As Hiram approached Bruce, however, it was quite natural that he should be attracted by two dazzling sparks of flashing light.

"Diamonds!" cried Bruce, moving the two pins about so as to display their brilliancy to advantage.

"Sure as you live!" agreed Hiram. "Where did you get them?"

"I found them behind, and under the cushion of the cockpit seat. Don't you understand, Hiram?"

"How they got there? I don't."

"Why, it's clear, to my way of thinking. The man the police chased, who made you take him in the *Scout*——"

"Why, say, that may be so," agreed Hiram with a start. "He must have been loaded with them, to drop them around promiscuously that way."

"They slipped from his pocket probably," explained Bruce. "I don't believe he had got rid of

his plunder, as the police think, when he made for the *Scout*. I believe he had them with him, else what are these pins doing here? Hiram, you said it was Wayville, didn't you? That was the town nearest to the place where the robber fell into the gully."

"You've remembered it so pat you must have heard of it before," suggested Hiram, with a shrewd glance at his companion.

"That's so," answered Bruce. "I was there once. It was when the circus man, Wertz, was in hiding. I was traveling with him then. He and some other men at the show robbed an old farmer, and had to get out of the way. It was near Wayville that we stayed for a week, till things 'blew over,' as they called it. In fact, when you described that thicket and the gully, it came right back to me, as natural as life. It's set me thinking, Hiram. I've got a theory, somehow, that the diamond thief got rid of his plunder after he left the *Scout*."

"Shouldn't wonder," remarked Hiram rather indifferently, "but we'll talk about that some other time. My mind is full of nothing but Dave and the *Ariel* just now. I've decided what I'm going to do, and you are to help me do it, if you will."

"I'm glad, Hiram," responded Bruce readily. "I'll work my finger nails off to be of any use to you, or your partner."

"I know that, Bruce," said Hiram, "and I know that I can trust you, which is a great relief to me now, when I'm in such trouble. Bring that bench out of the hangar, will you?"

"What for, Hiram?" asked Bruce in some wonder.

"I want to have a long talk with you, and I want to sit here in the open while we're at it, so we can watch out that no one hears us."

Bruce brought out the bench, setting it near the *Scout,* and facing the grounds in such a way that they could see in three directions. Hiram's face wore a serious, business-like look as he sat down beside his young friend.

"Maybe I've got it all wrong," he began, "but I've tried to imagine just what level-headed Dave Dashaway would do if he were in my fix. Of course I haven't got his brains or smartness, but I know one thing—he wouldn't get rattled. So I'm trying not to fly all to pieces and do all kinds of rash things. There's two men I want to see and get word to."

"Who are they?" inquired the interested Bruce.

"First, Mr. Brackett."

"Oh, sure, him!" exclaimed Bruce. "I've thought that all along."

"He's the head of all our plans," went on Hiram, "He's a good business man, he's rich and power-

ful, and he'd know how to handle this muddle better than I. Mr. Brackett must be seen, and you can get ready to take the first train for the town where he has his plant, Bruce."

This looked like a pretty important mission to Bruce. He was silent, however, as his companion proceeded:

"You are to see Mr. Brackett, tell him everything that has occurred, and ask him to send me instructions as to what I am to do. He will probably come right back with you. I hope so. There's a train leaving here inside of two hours. You will get to the little Ohio town where the Aero plant is located by early morning. Then, I suppose, Mr. Brackett will wire me."

"See here, Hiram," interposed Bruce, "do you think it's as good for me to go as yourself? There's lots of things in detail about the plots that have been working against you that I don't know about and you do."

"No," answered Hiram definitely, "I can't go. As I told you, there were two men to see about this affair."

"Yes, I remember. Who is the other one?"

"Mr. Borden."

"Oh, I see," said Bruce promptly. "Yes, indeed. If he's the true-blue fellow you think he is he can do something to help you."

"He gave us that warning," remarked Hiram. "He knew that something was going to happen. He was on the watch for our benefit."

"But Mr. Borden doesn't dare to show himself here and you can't go to the Syndicate camp," argued Bruce.

"I've got to see that man just as soon as I possibly can," said Hiram, his eyes snapping with determination. "You leave that to me. I've got to go down to the offices of the meet for some money. You get ready to start for the train as soon as I come back."

Bruce smiled to himself as he proceeded to "get ready." His wardrobe was not very extensive, and he could pack in his pockets the extra collars and handkerchiefs that comprised it. Hiram came back in half an hour, and handed him some bills.

"Here's a time-table," he added. "I shall be anxious till I hear from you."

"Say, Hiram," said Bruce, "that fellow, Valdec——"

"Yes, what about him?" demanded the young airman, sharply.

"He strolled by here while you were gone. He was with one of the crowd that hangs around their camp. He looked at me and scowled. Then he grinned."

"I'll go with you down to the train," said Hiram.

"Then I'll know what he was grinning about, or my name isn't Dobbs!"

The boys kept their eyes open on the way to the railroad depot. No one of the Syndicate crowd seemed to be following, or watching them, however.

"Tell Mr. Brackett everything, Bruce," directed Hiram, "and get me word just as soon as you can."

"Hope for the best, Hiram," said Bruce cheeringly. "There's surely some way out of this trouble for two smart fellows like you and Dave Dashaway."

Hiram waved his hand in adieu to Bruce as the train started. Then Hiram proceeded back to the hangar, his lips compressed and his face looking resolute.

"Now to wait until dark!" grimly soliloquized the young pilot of the *Scout*.

CHAPTER XVIII

A STRANGE MESSAGE

"Too worried to eat," spoke Hiram Dobbs to himself at supper time. "Too busy to do any sleeping to-night."

Dusk had settled down over the International grounds as he sallied forth after an impatient hour spent in waiting for darkness. He locked the hangar, and turned in the direction of the Syndicate camp.

"Slow, and cautious, and sure," murmured Hiram. "I've got plenty of time, and I must be careful not to muddle matters through any haste. It's Borden, first and foremost. When I locate him I'll find some way to attract his attention."

Hiram followed the fence, keeping away from casual pedestrians and crowds. He passed the hangar next in the line to the Syndicate camp. About to approach nearer, Hiram stretched himself carelessly along a slanting fence support as though taking a rest, for a man was coming towards him. It was one of the "White Wings" battalion, Hi-

ram at once made out. The man wore the white khaki uniform of the men supposed to keep the grounds in order. He had a pronged stick, and slung at his side a light but deep basket.

Whenever he came to a piece of paper, rags, or the like, he would spear the same, and transfer it to his basket. Daytimes the sanitary squad kept the streets in order. Early in the evening they went about gathering up the refuse that littered the grounds.

Hiram decided to wait till the man got out of the way before he approached nearer to the Syndicate camp. He noticed that the man had an uncertain gait. He missed spearing several pieces of paper. One the wind kept scurrying along every time he neared it. Hiram would have been amused at any other time. Finally, in trying to corner a whirling fragment of paper, the man stumbled and fell flat, the basket on top of him.

"Here, let me help you," proffered Hiram.

"That you, Palen?" spoke a sharp voice, as the unfortunate man was mumbling out his thanks to Hiram. "I've been looking for you."

Hiram turned to observe one of the lieutenants in charge of the grounds-workers.

"Late again, and in a fine condition, aren't you?" demanded the newcomer in a stern, censur-

ing tone. "You're discharged, do you hear? You've been careless for the last two days."

"Yes, sir—bad cold. Not feelin' well. Don't like this job anyhow," the man mumbled.

"Well, get through with your work, if you've sense enough to do it, and draw your pay. We can't have your kind around here."

The official walked away with these words. His subordinate steadied himself against a fence-support, and watched the other disappear. Then he threw the spear-stick to the ground, tossed the basket after it and muttered glumly:

"All right. Sick of the place anyhow. I'll do no more work!"

Hiram had been casually interested in the episode. Suddenly it suggested an idea to his quick mind. He took a dollar bill from his pocket.

"Say, my friend," he spoke, "I like exercise. You lend me your jacket and hat, and I'll give you that, and do the rest of your work."

"Well!" murmured the man stolidly. "Must have lots of money to waste it that way. That's a bargain. Leave the old coat and hat where they'll find it, will you? There you are," and the speaker divested himself of the bulk of his uniform, and went off with the dollar, chuckling gleefully.

Hiram waited till the man was out of sight. Then he went to the side of a path and proceeded to

daub his hands and face with dust. The clumsy jacket came nearly to his knees. The hat was helmet-shaped. It dipped both front and rear and well shadowed his face.

"I think I'll do. I can surely pass for what I pretend to be, if I don't get where it's too light," decided Hiram.

A more industrious "white wings" never worked on the International grounds. Hiram seemed to have eyes for every stray fragment of rubbish. He boldly invaded the precincts of the Syndicate camp. Just inside several hangar's men were playing cards, smoking and conversing.

"I don't see anything of Mr. Borden," soliloquized Hiram disappointedly. "There's Worthington, though, and his special man, Valdec."

The humble, dust-covered grounds-man picking up rubbish, suggested nothing suspicious to the two men, as Hiram poked around a bench on which they were seated engrossed in earnest conversation. Hiram speared an empty cigarette box not three feet away from the foot of Valdez. He approached close to the side of the bench making a great ado of kneeling, and picking up the fragments of a torn programme of the meet.

"Yes, I've got the altitude stunt fixed for good," he overheard Valdec observe.

"How is that," inquired the big Syndicate manager.

"A dummy barograph," chuckled the trick aeronaut. "Oh, I'll beat ten thousand feet easy as pie! The *Ariel* might have made it, but—pouf! We've got that off our minds, more's the luck! You're sure there's no chance of Dashaway coming on the scene to spoil things?"

"Dashaway won't get away," coarsely laughed Worthington. "I sent Borden down with Terry to double the guard on him this afternoon."

Some one hailed the manager just then and the talk ended. Hiram's spirits drooped. Borden had been sent away from the meet before he could get any further word to the *Ariel* hangar. For some time Hiram hung around, hoping to overhear some indication as to the place where his chum was undoubtedly held a captive. His energy was unrewarded, and he returned to his own hangar.

"I know two things," he reflected, but disconsolately, as he tossed restlessly in bed some hours later. "Dave is alive—the *Ariel* is gone. Another thing; we won't be in this meet. Poor Dave! How will it all come out?"

Hiram was fairly frantic when the next day passed, and there was no word from Bruce. The next morning he had decided to proceed to see Mr. Brackett himself, fearing that something had hap-

pened to his messenger, when Bruce himself appeared.

"What news? Quick!" spoke Hiram, in great excitement. "What kept you?"

"I was delayed. Mr. Brackett was away until yesterday afternoon. He listened to my story and asked me a hundred questions. Then he sent a note to you. Here it is."

Hiram was so eager and anxious that he fairly tore a folded sheet from the hand of Bruce. Quickly his eyes scanned its contents.

And thus it read:

"Go right on, the same as if Dashaway and the *Ariel* were ready for the contest."

CHAPTER XIX

Ariel II

"Hold me, Bruce! I'm seeing things!" gasped Hiram Dobbs, half whimsically.

"You're seeing Dave Dashaway. Both of us are. Oh, hooray!"

"And the *Ariel*——"

"A new *Ariel—Ariel II;* don't you see? Brace up—hurry! Don't you understand that everything has come out all right at last?"

It was nine o'clock in the morning of the great day. All the entrants were expected to report within the ensuing sixty minutes. On the Saturday previous those who had not qualified fully had been ruled out of the competition. Some had not supplied the required data. Some had not been able to promise the delivery of their machines on the grounds before the contest began. Others were mere amateurs in aviatics, with no demonstrated records.

Those had been anxious, unsatisfactory days for Hiram and Bruce that succeeded the strange, yet

definite message from Mr. Brackett. There was a ray of hope in his explicit direction to go right on, just as if there had been no break in the programme laid out by Dave the day they arrived at the International grounds. Both Hiram and Bruce were very secretive. They took a flight each day in the *Scout*. They mingled with the crowds at headquarters. They picked up all the information possible and kept in touch with everything going on.

The Syndicate crowd had gone past their hangar frequently, as if trying to probe what lay behind their composure and system. Twice they had detected a lurker outside the hangar, eavesdropping. He got little satisfaction, however, for the boys suspected his pretense and talked of matters a thousand miles away from Mr. Brackett, Dave Dashaway and the *Ariel*.

And now, eager, anxious, prepared for disappointment yet hoping, dreaming, they had come down to the grand stand where the inspection of the entrants of the day was to take place.

Valdec and his crowd were very much in evidence. It was characteristic of the juggler airman to assume airs of mystery, distinction and oddness. He wore a score of trumpetry medals, and gave a reckless swing to his machine as he circled the grounds and alighted the nearest to the sand occupied by the judges. It was plainly to be seen that

he believed himself the hero of the day. Worthington strutted around followed by his contingent, some of whom were to take part in various minor contests after the first day. It had been depressing to Hiram to note the buoyancy and assurance of this crowd. It nettled him to think that for him the meet, and all appertaining it to, was a hollow farce without his chum. Then came the climax. Nearly all the contesting air craft had reported, and were in full view inside the roped off space near the starter's box. It lacked thirty minutes of the stroke of the bell that would exclude all delinquent contestants, when Bruce, seated on a bench, suddenly nudged his companion.

"There's a beauty," he remarked and Hiram lifted his rather gloomy glance to inspect a speck of activity cutting the air like a swift yacht on a clear water course.

Far to the south the stranger was evidently making a bee-line direct for the center field. Other eyes than those of the boys began to inspect the approaching biplane. As it came nearer its graceful outlines, its perfectly true maneuvers, caused attention and speculation among expert airmen about the stand. The Valdec crowd had become interested. Then the strained gaze of Hiram Dobbs wavered and he burst forth with the characteristic outbreak:

"Hold me Bruce—I'm seeing things!"

Then in a sort of delirious transport he allowed his equally excited comrade to drag him towards the center field with the ringing announcement that:

"Everything has come out all right at last!"

As they hurried along Hiram stripped off his coat. It revealed him in flight trim, neat and natty, for he had prepared for his very best appearance, not knowing what might turn up. He threw the garment to Bruce with the words: "Take care of it." Then: "Dave!—Dave!—Dave!" he shouted, tumbled over a rope, and, regaining his feet, stood still, for others had gathered about the *Ariel II.*

"Everything's fixed!" gloated Hiram, eager with delight. "Oh, but this is grand!"

Mr. Brackett had suddenly appeared from among the crowd. With him was the manager of the meet, and two other officials. Hiram fancied that the manufacturer was dilating on the points of the new machine, for he moved his hand about, making a sweeping movement over this and that portion of the beautiful mechanism.

Hiram fixed a look upon the chum of whom he had such good reason to feel proud. Never had the young aviator looked so completely at his best. Dave's eye was bright, his face bronzed with sunburn. He wore an entirely new outfit. He was paying respectful but intelligent attention to the questions of those about him.

"I wonder," breathed Hiram suddenly. He turned squarely around. It was in the direction of the Syndicate airship. They had named it the *Whirlwind.* Its pilot had just alighted.

Valdec stood holding to one of the wings, as if spell-bound. His lower jaw had fallen, his face was a picture of amazement and discomfiture. To Hiram his usually sneering lips seemed drawn and white as he put some question to Worthington, who stood at his side.

The latter muttered something. Then his head went forward until his big, full neck showed. It was something like a mastiff baffled of its prey. Hiram Dobbs laughed, he could not help it—a joyous, boyish, delighted laugh, and those about the *Whirlwind* heard him. He received a menacing glance from Valdec. Worthington scowled darkly and showed his teeth.

"Dave!" cried Hiram again, watching his chance, and bolting past several persons engaged in admiring inspection of the new *Ariel.*

His chum leaped from his seat and their hands met. Their eyes also. In those of his tutor, and close friend, Hiram read nerve and courage. Somehow, he had a sure conviction that Dave Dashaway had come upon the scene at the last moment determined to win.

Not a word passed between them. Too many

were listening, and Hiram had sense enough to copy the pleasing composure of his leader. The signal for clearing the field was given from the judges' stand. Hiram waved a hand joyously at his chum, and got under the ropes. He made out Mr. Brackett and hurried after him, to find Bruce at his heels. The latter did not have the professional badge which had admitted the others to the field.

"Ah, Dobbs!" greeted the big manufacturer, as Hiram crowded up to his side. "And you too, Beresford? Taken care of everything, of course?"

"Just followed orders—sure!" replied Hiram, nodding energetically.

"It paid; didn't it?" intimated Mr. Brackett, with a wave of his hand towards the new machine and its pilot.

"I should say it did!" cried the impetuous young airman. "Oh, how did you ever bring it all about?"

"Through one of the friends you and Dashaway seem to have the faculty of gaining everywhere you go," answered the manufacturer.

"Was Dave shut up bad—or long?"

"No. Within twenty-four hours of his capture he was at our plant and has been practicing every day since. As to the old *Ariel*—what do you think of *Ariel II*?"

Hiram was satisfied for the present with the brief

explanation made. In his own mind he could readily reason out that Borden had, in some way, been instrumental in the escape of Dave.

"They're getting ready," broke in Bruce. He was bubbling over with excitement and exultation. Mr. Brackett had led them to a section in the rows just back of the big stand. He had seated himself comfortably, but his two young guests were unable to keep still, and stood up and moved about, buoyant and expectant.

"Plain sailing," announced some one from the next section, reading the programme, and a smile of satisfaction showed on the face of the big aeroplane manufacturer.

There were twelve entries for this number, for it was a free-for-all, purposely allowed to give air craft builders a chance to show their machines. Hiram and Bruce had eyes only for Dave and the new *Ariel.* It left the ground at the signal, smoothly and promptly.

"Self-starter," spoke the complacent manufacturer to his young allies. "For grace, lightness and accuracy we back this, our latest machine, against the world."

Even to Hiram, daily in the past the companion of Dave Dashaway in his marvelous cloud-work, the aspect of the new machine was a revelation. Its progress was noiseless, its sweep sure and scientific.

Within five minutes after the general ascent was made the boys had but to listen to the comments going on about them, to realize that on a popular vote *Ariel II* would be awarded the prize.

Some of the contesting pilots could not sustain a protracted flight, some of the machines did not work smoothly. The contest narrowed down to six, then to three. The *Whirlwind* showed great rapidity, but was erratic and shifty at volplane work and drift. Finally Valdec descended. Dave's last competitor followed his example. The *Ariel* floated to anchor, buoyant as a swan gliding to rest.

Fifteen minutes later the official marker ascended the little platform on which rested a great ruled-off blackboard. He set at work on event number one.

Hiram's eyes were snapping. Mr. Brackett drew a long breath of mingled assurance and suspense.

"Hurrah!" yelled Bruce Beresford irrepressibly. Hiram flung his cap up in the air. Mr. Brackett beamed on everybody, and the crowd went wild.

"Event No. 1—Winner, Machine number five," the man wrote. That was the awarded numeral of the Brackett entry. "Pilot—Dashaway. Points—thirty."

Thus read the chronicle of the initial event on the big programme, awarding to Dave Dashaway the first victory of the meet.

CHAPTER XX

BEATEN

HIRAM DOBBS was whistling like a nightingale, Bruce Beresford was polishing up the brass work of the new *Ariel* for the fifth or sixth time, when suddenly Hiram made a derisive sweep with his handful of cotton waste towards two passers-by—Valdec and one of his crowd.

"Hah!" uttered Dave Dashaway's assistant—"you've had your claws cut short this time!"

Safe and sound, more than hopeful, and very happy felt the young pilot of the *Scout*. Hiram could defy all his foes now. Day and night, half a dozen men from the aero plant formed a perfect cordon around the hangar which housed the almost sure winner of the International, as Hiram insisted on putting it.

There had been a sort of jollification conference the evening before in a room at the grounds club-house, where the manufacturer and his three friends felt free to discuss affairs in general without the fear of intruders or listeners. It was there

that Dave explained his recent adventure at the sand dunes. His capture and the destruction of the old *Ariel* had been the result of a well laid plot on the part of the Syndicate crowd and their allies.

It was Borden who had saved the day. Hiram's heart warmed anew towards the tramp artist as he realized how loyally the latter had repaid the slight kindness they had shown a homeless wanderer at the Midlothian grounds.

"Mr. Borden warned you too late, Hiram," explained Dave, "but he found a way, a little later, to be doubly useful in our interests. The men who made me a prisoner at the sand dunes and burned up the old *Ariel* I had never seen before. I was taken perhaps thirty miles in a closed wagon, tied hand and foot, and guarded by a balking fellow, so I kept pretty still."

"Where did they take you, Mr. Dashaway?" the interested Bruce had asked.

"To an old building in a big town over the state line. It must have been a factory, at some time or other. It had all gone to ruin, and they kept me in a room in the boiler house, with a heavy iron door to it. The Syndicate crowd sent Mr. Borden down to help their man guard me. I don't know how he managed it, but he got entire charge of me, and let his supposed fellow watchman lay around the town. The first night he got a wire to Mr. Brackett

who came down for me. Since then I have been practicing near the Aero Company's plant, and watching our new beauty of a biplane grow into the finest craft of its class in the world."

"And Mr. Borden?" pressed Hiram curiously.

"I don't think the Syndicate crowd had the least idea that I was free until I showed up on the grounds here," declared Dave.

"What'll they do when they find out he's hocussed them?" asked Bruce.

"I have supplied our good friend, Mr. Borden, with the means of going about where he pleases," observed Mr. Brackett with a smile. "They won't find him unless he wants to be found, you may rest assured of that fact."

"And are those fellows to be allowed to go scot free after all they've done!" cried the indignant Hiram.

"I hardly think we will disturb them if they leave us alone—at least for the present," replied the manufacturer. "You see, Hiram, we might not be able to fasten the plot directly upon them. It is still my opinion that Vernon, our old time enemy, is the main actor in all these outrages, although he has pretty cleverly covered up his tracks."

"Well, so far—everything is fine!" declared the volatile Hiram. "Oh, Dave, if you only win the altitude contest to-morrow!"

"The new *Ariel* can do its share," insisted Mr. Brackett.

"I shall try to do mine," added the young aviator modestly.

"Fifty points!" murmured Hiram. "Score that and you are sure of the big prize," and Hiram had a vision of that official blackboard marker giving to his chum the second award in the International contest.

Four machines besides their own were listed for the altitude contest and the *Whirlwind* was among them. The first thing the observant Hiram noticed as they reached the center field was that Valdec wore his ordinary sailing jacket. Dave was fully prepared for any cold he might run into. Besides that, at his side, was a light, round tank with a coil of rubber hose running from it.

"We're testing an emergency oxygen supply, if the air gets too rarefied," Dave explained to Hiram. "It may work in quite well when we get up above ten thousand feet."

"Oh, Dave, you can't hope to do that!" exclaimed his young assistant.

The manager and a helper visited the five machines while the rules of the contest were being read by his secretary. The barograph of each biplane was examined, sealed up and put in place.

Three hours was the time limit allowed, the pilots to select their own course.

There was some cloudiness, but no wind, and the five machines made a splendid initial rise. The *Whirlwind* was all for speed. Dave took it more slowly. Within fifteen minutes the five crafts were scattered to all points of the compass. They became mere specks as a lower strata of cloud haze obscured them. Then they vanished from view as a denser upper cumulus enveloped them.

At eleven o'clock one of the contestants came back to the grounds because of a break in the control. A comrade competitor gave up the contest a quarter of an hour later. Number three reported itself out of the race at noon.

"It's the *Ariel* and the *Whirlwind,*" went the rounds of the stand. Everybody was wrought up to a great pitch of doubt and suspense. The clouds still obscured all sight of the clear sky.

"There's one of them!" burst out a voice and there was great excitement as an air craft came sailing swiftly into view.

"The *Whirlwind,*" spoke a man with a pair of field glasses.

The Syndicate machine came to anchor as Worthington and his allies rushed toward it. Valdec stepped out of the biplane smiling and profuse in his bows. He joked and laughed as the expert removed

the barograph, hastened to the judges' stand and then placed it in a strong tin box and locked it in.

"Here's the other!" The shout announced the *Ariel*. In about twenty minutes the boys and Mr. Brackett were crowding about it. The machine was dripping with moisture, and as it touched the ground its pilot removed his head gear, and fell over to one side, gasping for breath.

"He's collapsed!" exclaimed an attendant and ran for water. They lifted Dave out of the machine. Mr. Brackett and Hiram supported him. The expert had removed the barograph. They made Dave swallow some water, rubbed his hands, and finally he opened his eyes. He smiled vaguely.

"I made it," he spoke with difficulty. "Nearly went under, but I had set my mark—over eleven thousand feet."

"You couldn't! It's ahead of any record! He's dreaming!" blurted out Hiram.

"The barograph says so—I've won. I knew I should," murmured Dave. "Get me somewhere to lie down. I'm weak and dizzy."

"What's that!" suddenly spoke Hiram, turning sharply as they were leading Dave over to the club house.

They were at a point where they could not see the blackboard. Hiram noticed a great crowd about it. Cheers rent the air. A man bolted from the

mass, bareheaded, excited, rushing down the road wildly. Hiram recognized him as one of the Syndicate hangers-on.

"What is it?" was demanded of him by an inquisitive pedestrian.

"Record smashed!" came the breathless but triumphant reply. "Valdec has won—12,350 feet!"

CHAPTER XXI

"FIFTY POINTS"

"You've got something on your mind, Bruce! What is it?" challenged Hiram Dobbs.

"Oh, just thinking," answered Bruce in a way meant to be offhanded, but palpably evasive and embarrassed.

"You can't fool me!" insisted Hiram in his persistent fashion. "Ever since you took those diamonds back to the police you've been mooning. You don't mean to tell me you've caught the detective-fever?"

"Me!" laughed Bruce. "No more chance of that than of running an airship. I'd better correct one false impression you've got, though, Hiram."

"And what is that?"

"I didn't take those diamonds to the police at all."

"Didn't? Well, that's news!" declared Hiram wonderingly.

"You see, you were all so busy here I didn't want

to bother you about a little thing like that. I took the diamonds back to the people who lost them. I've had an idea about those diamonds for some time."

"You have some good ideas, Bruce—what's this one?"

"Why, I have felt satisfied all along that the thief had those diamonds when he was escaping in the *Scout*."

"We all believe that. What of it?" inquired the young pilot of the craft in question.

"So, I've dreamed—only dreamed, mind you—of maybe some time going and looking for them."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Hiram. "I guess you have no idea of what hunting around the place where the thief landed might mean. If he really had them and lost them, or hid them, or threw them away, there's half a mile of thicket, gully and creek to go over, with about one chance in a thousand of hitting the right spot. You never ran across such a mixed up place."

"It's because I was once right in it all for a week or more that I got interested," explained Bruce.

"Well, there may be something in your idea, Bruce," admitted Hiram. "Just now, though, we've got more important business on hand. We must add twenty points to our thirty before sundown, you know."

"Oh, I hope you make it!" said Bruce ardently.

"I've been worried ever since the Syndicate crowd beat in the altitude work."

"Beat! who's—beat! what?" almost shouted Hiram, becoming vociferous, and looking wrathful. Mr. Brackett and Dave are saying little and thinking a good deal. They may talk out when the governing committee passes on the prizes. I'm doing some guessing myself, and I'd give all I'm worth to see one man for just one minute, and that's Mr. Borden."

"Aha!" cried Bruce—"got a secret yourself, have you?"

"Never mind if I have. It isn't the time to talk about it just yet," retorted Hiram mysteriously. "I've got some common sense, though, and lots of confidence in the word of Dave Dashaway. You heard what he told us about that altitude climate. It nearly finished him, even with that new oxygen device aboard. He was soaked, frozen, exhausted when he landed, wasn't he? And Valdec wasn't even damp! Again, Dave says he never caught sight of the *Whirlwind* over the 7,000 foot level. There's another county to hear from!" concluded Hiram, "and I've got something under my hat."

"What, Hiram?" asked Bruce, but his comrade only laughed, and walked off to greet Mr. Brackett and Dave, who, at that moment, approached the hangar.

The mail bag delivery contest was one of several set for that day. There were only five entries, the *Scout* being among the number. Neither Dave nor Valdec were listed as principals, but one of the Syndicate machines had been entered.

It was in the *Scout* that its pilot had done his practicing and the *Ariel* was not called into service. A crew of two was apportioned to each machine competing and Dave of course was to take charge of the wheel.

"Looks like a game of basket ball," remarked Hiram as they drove the *Scout* over to center field.

The grounds had a two mile circular track, being used on other occasions for motor contests. Around this, and at each corner of the grounds, poles twenty feet high had been set up. At the top of the poles were woven baskets about two feet deep and double that width at their flanging tops.

Poles and baskets were painted white and were conspicuous to the eye for a long distance. There were some twenty-five of these improvised postal stations. That number of bags was put in the cockpit of each machine. Each set was marked with a numeral, those on the *Scout* bearing the Brackett entrant number, which was five.

The bags had been furnished by the city post office people, were about two by four feet and filled each with twenty pounds of newspapers and old en-

velopes. The time limit on the stunt was one hour.

"It's going to be interesting," Mr. Brackett remarked to Bruce Beresford, who with him occupied an advantageous stall near the central stand.

"The crowd seems to think so," replied Bruce. "It's something new, and nearly everybody has a score card."

Bruce himself was prepared to keep "tab" on the mail deliveries. One, three, five, nine and eleven were in commission, and the machines were sufficiently varied in construction and appearance to enable even a novice to identify them separately when in operation. There was valor and confidence in Hiram's last hand wave.

"I hope the lad makes his points," spoke Mr. Brackett.

"It will break his heart if he doesn't," declared Bruce. "Why shouldn't he, though? He's ahead of the rest of them on practicing, and he's got an expert pilot in his machine."

"There's a hit!" cried a voice near them, and necks were craned and eyes strained to watch a leather bag go tumbling over the edge of aeroplane number three. It landed directly on the basket aimed at—and the crowds yelled at this first sample of a new feature in aviatics.

"What's wrong?" inquired a curious voice.

The guard stationed under the basket where the

mail bag had fallen had stepped slightly away from his post. He had unfurled and was waving a blue flag.

"It doesn't count," guessed Bruce readily. "The machine must have been under the low level."

A great laugh next swept the mob of onlookers. The Syndicate biplane had sent down a bag aimed at another basket. It went so far wide of its mark that it landed on the shoulders of a "White Wings" man thirty feet away, knocking off his hat and sending him scampering as though a bomb had struck him.

"Hiram—good—one!" suddenly yelled Bruce.

"You mean two," remarked Mr. Brackett quietly a minute later, but with a slight chuckle of satisfaction.

The *Scout* had made two deliveries into different baskets true as a die. Unlike any of the others, the little machine sailed high, and as it approached a delivery point described a swift swoop. So true were the calculations of Dave Dashaway, that, directly at the turn of the volplane Hiram let loose the mail bag, counting on a forward sway of several feet in the descent.

"Ah—missed! but it hit the edge of the basket," reported Bruce. Then the fourth one landed directly within its intended receptacle.

There were generally cheers for the *Scout,* even

when Hiram missed on three deliveries. These, however, never dropped more than five feet away from the base of the pole, while some of the other contestants saw their mail bags go half a hundred feet from the goal.

"Seventy mail bags delivered, only thirteen not gone foul, and the *Scout* scores seven of them," cried Bruce, half an hour later. "There's a dive for you—oh, grand!"

Three of the contestants with a decidedly poor showing retired from the field, among them the Syndicate entrant. Nine kept aloft, with three deliveries to its score.

It seemed as though Dave and Hiram were husbanding their strength for a final brilliant exploit. The *Scout* took a backward swing of nearly a mile. Then at full speed its pilot headed it down the last side of the long track.

"Eight, nine and ten—oh, they've made it!" shouted the delighted Bruce Beresford. "Thirty and twenty are fifty. Mr. Brackett, we're even now with the *Whirlwind* people!"

CHAPTER XXII

QUEER PROCEEDINGS

HIRAM and Bruce talked of many matters the rest of that day. The former was proud and elated over his success, and Bruce would not discount the greatness of his friend's feat.

"You beat them all put together," he told Hiram. "I heard two men talking with one of the committee near the grand stand. I think they had something to do with the government postal service."

"They can't hire me away from Dave," observed Hiram with a wink and a laugh.

"Well, they asked the committee man for the names of the crew of the *Scout* and took them down."

"Oh, it wasn't much," insisted Hiram. "All I'm glad for is that it gives us twenty more points. I feel safe now."

"What! with the big event, the long distance stunt, ahead?"

"There hasn't been a second that Mr. Brackett

and Dave have not counted on the *Ariel* winning that particular event," declared Hiram.

"It's to-morrow; isn't it?" asked Bruce. "I hope we have a fine day."

The conversation took place just before dusk. Then Mr. Brackett and Dave called Hiram into the little office of the hangar to go over some details of the morrow's race. Bruce got through with some cleaning work about the *Scout,* put on his coat and passed by the hangar entrance.

"Say, you go down to the restaurant and wait for me," spoke Hiram, appearing in the doorway. "I'll be along in about fifteen minutes."

"All right," assented Bruce, and he started across the grounds, whistling cheerily.

It was wonderful the change that had taken place in the appearance and fortunes of the orphan lad, since his first chance acquaintance with Hiram Dobbs, and later with Dave Dashaway. As he proceeded to the restaurant, free, well dressed, with money in his pocket and all worry about his little sister Lois gone, Bruce felt like a new being.

"If ever a fellow was grateful I am!" he soliloquized. "Those two friends have not only asked me to stay with them, but really want me to do it. Even Mr. Brackett has taken a liking to me. He told Mr. Dashaway to put me on the pay roll at ten dollars a week, and I'm a part of all this great bustle

and excitement going on here. And that scheme of mine—the diamonds!"

The speaker's eyes sparkled. He had not told Hiram everything about them—an interruption had diverted into business channels a conversation they were holding. Then the winning of the mail bag contest had put everything else out of the head of the proud young pilot of the *Scout* for the time being.

Bruce had not taken the diamond stick pins found in the little biplane to the police. He had ferreted around and had located the people from whom they were stolen. The robbery had taken place at a large jewelry store. Bruce had called upon its proprietor.

The latter regarded him at first with some suspicion, for Bruce was guarded, and felt his way cautiously. He produced the diamonds he had found, and told his story.

"Why—I've come to you, is because I'm willing to give some time to hunting for the rest of those diamonds if you say the word," he had told the jeweler. "I've got some ideas. Maybe they're no good, but I'm pretty well acquainted around Wayville, the town where the robber was hurt, and I might stumble across something."

The jeweler became eager. He was dissatisfied with the police, he said. He encouraged Bruce in every way he could. He even offered to pay a re-

ward for the recovery of the stick pins. This Bruce declined. However, when he left the store it was with a springy step and great hopes—and the promise of a reward if he found the robber's booty thrilled him.

"Why, I'd be rich!" he told himself breathlessly. "I'd have money enough to fight old Martin Dawson through the courts to the last finish. Oh, yes—as soon as the meet here is over, I'm going to go to Wayville. There's something I know that the police didn't know, and it may lead to big results."

Bruce reached the restaurant dwelling on excited anticipations over the diamonds, and filled with pleasant thoughts as to his new environment generally. His mind was fully occupied for about a quarter of an hour. Then he began to get hungry and impatient for Hiram to arrive. A man came in rather hurriedly, and went over to a table in a shadowed corner of the room. Bruce, studying everything going on to pass the time away, noticed something peculiar about the newcomer.

The latter wore a light overcoat with a well turned up collar. He had a very dark beard, and wore colored goggles.

"I'll wager that man doesn't want to be noticed much," thought Bruce, as the man took a seat with his back turned to those at the other tables.

The newcomer ordered a light lunch. He did

not seem to enjoy it much. He ate it rapidly. Then he kept looking at his watch as if impatient for some certain minute to arrive. He drew the bill of fare towards him, fumbled it over, took a pencil from his pocket and began aimlessly to scribble on its reverse blank surface.

Finally he arose, and, pulling his cap well down over his eyes, proceeded to the cashier's desk to pay his check. Just then Hiram came in at a side door. He slipped into the seat opposite Bruce and fixed his eyes upon his face.

"Don't make any suspicious move," he spoke under his breath and rapidly. "You noticed the man who sat at the table over in the corner yonder?"

"The one just paying his check? Why, yes, I've been watching him for the last half hour. He's leaving the restaurant now."

"Go after him, don't delay," urged Hiram excitedly. "I've been watching him, too—through the window. Follow him, and see where he goes and get word to me as quick as you can."

"Why, Hiram——"

"Don't waste time!" interrupted Hiram almost sharply. "I may be mistaken—I think not, and this is important."

Bruce questioned no further. He was used to obeying his friend implicitly and he had a firm be-

lief that, impetuous as he sometimes was, Hiram generally knew what he was about.

The minute Bruce was gone Hiram glided over to the table recently occupied by the stranger. His point of immediate interest was the bill of fare upon which the man had just been scribbling—Hiram scanned its surface eagerly. His eyes brightened from surmise to conviction.

"Aha!" he almost cried out. "I was right. It's Mr. Borden."

What that might mean to them all Hiram did not know. Why Borden had appeared on the scene in disguise he did not know, either. All Hiram considered at that moment was that the tramp artist had proven a good friend in the past. He had not come to them of late, and probably had a reason for it. He would scarcely venture in the vicinity of the Syndicate crowd unless he had another reason.

Borden might have been a tramp once, but he presented that appearance no longer. Artist he still was, for he had idly sketched many faces upon the bill of fare because it was natural for him to do it.

Hiram had been nearing the restaurant when he saw the man enter it. Something in the free, careless swing of the stranger had reminded him of their old friend of the Midlothian grounds. He had watched him through the window. Now he had verified his suspicions.

"What is it going to lead to?" he meditated impatiently and sat drumming his finger tips nervously on the table, waiting for his friend and messenger to show up.

Worthington, Valdec and three others of the Syndicate crowd strolled noisily into the restaurant. The coincidence of their arrival made the thoughtful Hiram wonder if Borden had been timing their movements.

In about twenty minutes he saw Bruce enter the doorway, so Hiram arose quickly and jostled him back into the street.

"Never mind supper for a bit," he said, leading his companion to a distance from the restaurant. "The Worthington crowd are in there and they might be snooping around if we got to talking. The man you followed—what about him?"

"He slipped away from me," reported Bruce with some perturbation, "in the most remarkable way."

"Where did he go?" pressed Hiram.

"To the Syndicate hangar. Most of that crowd were getting ready for supper. The man you sent me to follow went in around the camp in a sly, slinking way as if he knew his bearings pretty well."

"He did, indeed!" murmured Hiram.

"I thought," narrated Bruce, "that he had got

away from me, when he came bolting out from the big hangar. I hadn't seen him go in. He had something in one hand wrapped up in a piece of cloth, a bag I took it to be. He ran straight for the fence. I got behind a tool shed and watched him."

"Go on," urged Hiram eagerly.

"Well, one of the electric lights shone pretty bright just there. The man put his parcel on the ground. Then he took something from his pocket and slipped it across one ankle. I took it to be a band with a hook to it. He must have had another hook in his hand for he ran up that fence and vanished over the top of it like a monkey."

"But the package he brought from the *Whirlwind* hangar?" asked Hiram.

"Oh, yes—I came near forgetting that. When he set it on the ground the wrapping fell away from it and I saw what it was."

"And what was it?" asked Hiram.

"A barograph, just like the one you have in the *Ariel*."

"Are you sure?" eagerly asked Hiram. "A barograph, you say?"

"Yes," repeated Bruce, wondering at the earnest, excited manner of his comrade. "Even at the distance I was I could see the record reel and the metal recorder, and—why, what are you grabbing my

arm that way for?" inquired Bruce in surprise. "And you're trembling all over."

"Should think I would!" declared Hiram Dobbs, his tones quivering with the satisfaction of some great discovery—"I see the light at last!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A NOBLE DEED

WHATEVER the "light" was that Hiram Dobbs saw, he did not share the illumination with Bruce. In fact the latter did not expect it, and asked no questions.

So much had happened during the past two weeks that had tested the sense, courage and good judgment of the boys, that they had come to taking things conservatively, no matter what transpired.

Bruce was aware that Hiram attached a great deal of importance to the discovery of the disguised Borden. The mention of the barograph had decidedly stirred Hiram. Why, or wherefore, the young pilot of the *Scout* did not just then say. Perhaps outside of a theory he had formed, Hiram could not clearly have told himself. At all events, Bruce was satisfied to wait for further developments at a time when his friend was ready to divulge them.

The long distance flight was on for the next day. It was the big event of the meet, with a large num-

ber of entrants, and nothing else much was talked of that evening or the following morning. "Biplane and one passenger," ran the schedule and Hiram was glad of that.

"It's a hundred and ten mile flight," he remarked, "and the winner will come in under two hours."

"Not with that choppy northwest wind," reminded Dave. "There is one thing, though: the *Ariel* is made for all kinds of weather. It really gives the others a handicap."

The contestants were fully advised as to the rules of the race. The course was laid along the shore of the lake and described a complete semi-circle seventy miles in length. The turning point was at Grand Bay. All along the course men were posted to watch out for any deviation exceeding two miles from the shore line of the lake. At Grand Bay it was a straight away course back to the International grounds.

The *Whirlwind* came out with Valdec in the seat sneering and arrogant as usual. A youth about the age of Hiram occupied the cockpit. The machines were thus evenly matched. There were eighteen other entrants for the event.

"There're some pretty good machines in the race, Dave," his assistant remarked as they awaited the starting signal.

"I see that," replied the pilot of the *Ariel*. "We

mustn't miss a point, or lose a yard, on turns or drifting. Is everything all right?"

"As right as could be," answered Hiram buoyantly. "What's the programme, a rush?"

"Not at the start. We won't risk any mix up. Let the others, particularly the *Whirlwind,* catch a gait. Then we'll strike the higher level and get a clear course, if we're lucky enough to outdistance the others."

The start was very fine. It resembled the progress of a flock of birds trying their wings after a rest. Mr. Brackett looked greatly pleased as the *Ariel* did just what it had been built to do—rose lightly, made smooth upward progress and showed itself to be a very superior model of grace and efficiency.

"Oh, dear! over two hours' blind waiting," sighed Bruce, as the aerial fleet spread out, and grew less distinct, so that, even with a field glass, it was difficult to distinguish one machine from another.

"There's a breakdown!" Hiram announced, just as they passed the first observation station on the lake shore.

It was number six, a rather poor craft, and Dave could tell from its maneuvers that some of its gearing had gone wrong.

At the end of fifty miles, Hiram, watching out in every direction, gave a quick cry of satisfaction.

"I've counted them," he told his chum. "The ragtag and bobtail fell out before we got forty miles. There're two men even with us below, Dave. That one pegging away on the lower level is the *Whirlwind*."

"Yes, and doing very finely," commented Dave. "There're the smokestacks of Grand Bay ahead."

"Speed up, Dave," urged Hiram, his usual excitable nature getting the best of him.

The young aviator did not reply, but all his expert senses were on the alert. So far as he could judge, he had now but three rivals to fear. The *Whirlwind* was in the lead, but not for any great distance and would have to change its level when a turn was due.

Dave had a point in view in first ascertaining the number of his real rivals, and then their possible capabilities in the return flight. The wind had steadily grown stronger with the hours. The lake was rough and muddy, and a cloud film had overspread the sky.

To fly to the best advantage when the turn was made at Grand Bay, Dave saw that a system of tacking and circling would be necessary. The *Ariel* had been built purposely to meet these exigencies. He doubted if any of the three other machines could go through on any great rate of speed.

"I am sure of one thing," he reckoned quite con-

fidently; "the *Ariel* can outdo the *Whirlwind* two to one in drifting with the wind at its stern."

"Dave! I say, Dave!" cried Hiram Dobbs breathlessly. "Here comes the *Whirlwind!*"

"I see," answered Dave calmly.

"She's turning, she's first in rounding for the home run. Can't you speed up?"

Dave kept his eye on the machine he regarded as his principal rival. He watched its maneuvering narrowly. The *Whirlwind* had indeed turned, but now it was evident it had to contend with new and more difficult conditions.

"It's one thing to face the wind, and quite another to run away from it. Watch the control, Hiram," directed Dave.

"I've got both eyes in use," reported his assistant.

"Now then," said Dave simply. "Careful!"

He circled the point where a group of men were gathered, one with a white flag in his hand. This individual stood near a score board, and tallied off the machines as they passed.

The *Ariel* made a sort of leap, as her pilot brought the machine broadside to the fierce breeze. In two minutes the young aviator comprehended, and analyzed, the conditions as would an expert running a yacht.

"A fog is coming up, and it's misting," an-

nounced Hiram. "We're not cutting due west, are we?"

"Not on this occasion," responded Dave coolly. "Hiram, we'll make time and distance drifting south of the grounds. When we strike the land breeze it will be easier to fight our way back north."

"You know best, Dave," said Hiram, and then for a full quarter of an hour nothing further was said. Dave did some fine maneuvering. Hiram followed the signals given him as to the rear control apparatus, a mission that relieved the pilot from a sort of double duty under the present stress.

The muggy air prevented the young airman from making out what had become of the *Whirlwind* or their trailers. Dave had steadied quite successfully on a lateral course when Hiram leaned over towards him.

"Dave," he spoke quickly—"to the left, and a little ahead."

"I see—a craft of some kind on the lake."

"And a flag of distress—why, look! Dave, they've put off a raft, and it's swamped."

The young pilot lessened the speed of the *Ariel*. He eased its progress through a sliding drift. This brought them nearer to the craft tossing on the waters below.

"Water-logged and sinking!" exclaimed Hiram excitedly. "Dave, it's a real peril! See, the

ship has no wireless, and their lifeboat is gone. She can't last long, Dave!"

Dave had turned the head of the *Ariel* straight back landwards. In a flash his assistant understood.

"Top speed for a rescue steamer, or the life-saving service," announced Dave. His voice was slightly unsteady, for he realized the sacrifice he was about to make. "There're women and children aboard that boat."

"Yes, we've got to lose the race!" cried Hiram in disappointed tones.

"Better that than forget our humane duty," responded the young pilot of the *Ariel,* but he said it with a sinking heart.

The wind was now coming by fits and starts, and the sky looked anything but encouraging to the young airmen.

"We're in for a nasty blow, Dave," came from Hiram, anxiously.

"Looks that way."

"It's bad for that schooner."

"So it is."

"Do you think we can get help in time?"

"We've got to do it, Hiram. Think of those on board—maybe women and children as well as men!" and our hero shook his head sadly.

"It's quite a run."

"I know that as well as you do."

"And to miss winning that prize——"

"Do you want to win and let those people drown?"

"No, no, never!"

"Then don't say anything more about that prize."

"I won't, Dave. Yes, run for shore, and get help as soon as possible."

"I'll do it—and we'll save those poor people. Hiram, there may be——"

Dave did not have time to finish what he was going to say. A sudden gust of wind had struck the air craft, sending it whirling off its course.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HIDDEN DIAMONDS

"Look out, Dave!" shouted his young assistant and, as a snap sounded he shot a quick hand towards the lever operating the rear control mechanism.

"Blade cracked, nothing serious," instantly announced the pilot of the *Ariel.*

The machine had been hit in turning shorewards with a big wind blast that boomed like a cannon, and bore down upon it heavily. They felt the machine shiver and swerve, and there was some lateral flapping. Dave, however, kept steadily on back over the course he had so recently won.

It took twenty minutes to overlap the shore line. They made out a harbor and upon the pier at its end the flag of the life-saving service.

"You won't lose time landing, Dave?" spoke Hiram anxiously. "We might catch up yet."

"Got to land," reported Dave. "We can't risk the blade snapping."

The *Ariel* was directed across a flat sandy reach near the end of the pier. Dave sprang out instantly

and ran towards two men who had watched the descent.

"Schooner in distress," he announced briskly to the men. "I think she is sinking."

"Where away?" was inquired.

Dave described the position of the imperiled vessel as best he could. The men ran down the pier. Almost immediately a signal bell tolled, and a steam yacht, and two lifeboats, set out on their mission of rescue.

Dave had hurried back to the *Ariel*. He had the machine overhauled in a trice. One blade was seriously damaged. Those on the *Ariel* were of hard spruce wood, with a filling of mahogany. The lower veneer had stripped off and was dangling.

"It's a wonder it didn't strike the tail and cripple us," observed Dave, as he got out some tools and catgut, and had the defect remedied quickly. "I think that will last."

A report officer of the service had strolled to the spot, and asked some questions which Dave answered.

"He's writing down our names," whispered Hiram to his comrade.

"All ready," ordered Dave.

"Good luck!" shouted the officer after the ascending machine.

"I suppose it's hopeless to think that we're going

to even make a showing in this race," spoke Hiram disconsolately.

"I fancy you are right," replied Dave as steadily as he could.

Hiram was in suspense and misery. About twenty miles further along they made out one of the laggard airships fighting its way against the wind. From its maneuvers it was easy to surmise that all its pilot was aiming at was to keep out of trouble.

"Out of the race and knows it," commented Hiram. "I suppose it's forty points more for the *Whirlwind.*"

Dave said nothing. He was thinking of the possible disappointment of Mr. Brackett. He speeded the *Ariel* to its best pace, but had no hope now of reaching the International grounds first.

Hiram was in great suspense as they came up to the grounds from the south. His eager eyes scanned the center field. Then he fell back in his seat with a groan.

"One in—we're beaten, Dave," he almost sobbed. "It's the *Whirlwind.*"

They could see the Valdec machine plainly as they descended. There was a crowd around it. Dave landed near the judges' stand, turned the *Ariel* over to two attendants in the employ of their hangar, and went to headquarters to report. Bruce came running up to Hiram with a decidedly long face.

"The blackboard gives the race to Valdec," he spoke in a subdued tone.

"I guess they've won it," snapped Hiram. "Lording it over all creation, I suppose?"

"They feel pretty flighty," pronounced Bruce. "I'm dreadfully sorry."

"Where is Mr. Brackett?" asked Hiram, looking about for their friend and backer.

"Why, he was called to Chicago on business, and had to go. Said he'd be back by evening, though."

It was with a laggard, disheartened way that Hiram proceeded to the hangar. Dave joined the boys soon after. He tried to act cheerily, but secretly he was quite depressed.

He had done his best. Better than that, he had done just right. Business was business, however. Dave realized how greatly Mr. Brackett counted on the *Ariel* coming out victor and winner of the big prize. It was not so much the amount involved that the manufacturer cared for as a final recognition of the superior qualities of his machine.

"There's the fancy stunt event left yet," intimated Hiram after a somewhat gloomy spell of silence.

"Of course we will make a try at that," declared Dave, briskly. "I can't think of letting our practicing go for nothing."

"But fifty and forty make ninety," grumbled the

disconsolate Hiram. "There are only thirty points in the stunt event."

"Perhaps we can pick up a few points in the last day minor events," suggested Dave, hopefully.

Hiram would not be comforted. He spent a miserable afternoon. It added to his wretchedness as he wondered what Mr. Brackett would say. Hiram did not regret their action in the instance of the sinking vessel. All the same, their backer had a right to suppose they would have thought of his business interests first.

They came across the manufacturer just as they were going to supper. Hiram looked pretty serious as Mr. Brackett advanced towards them. He was all smiles and animation. He grasped first the hand of Dave, and then that of Hiram.

"Boys," he said, with a thrill of heartiness in his voice, "I'm proud of you!"

"Why—you see—don't you know that we lost out on the long distance race?" stammered Hiram.

"The long distance race is entirely secondary to what you two have done," declared the manufacturer. "I fancy you haven't seen the city evening paper? Well, there it is."

Mr. Brackett drew a late edition from his pocket. He shook it open and held it in front of his young friends.

"I'd rather be Dashaway and Dobbs, the way

that article tells about them," said Mr. Brackett, "than win twenty races, and all the prizes going."

There, sure enough, was glory and honor for the young aviators. A telegram with full details told of "the sure winner of the long distance race" putting back to give warning to save a vessel fast sinking in mid-lake with all on board.

"That's the kind of advertising that counts!" cried Mr. Brackett, with vim and satisfaction.

"But we've lost first place!" mourned Hiram.

"Not in the estimation of the world at large. That will not soon forget the *Ariel* and its crew."

Dave was relieved at the way his backer took the incident. It enhanced his regard and respect for a true friend and a true man a thousand fold.

The following day was to be given over to amateurs, and the exhibition of machines and their utilities. There was no thought in the mind of Dave of giving up the fancy stunt event, even if the grand prize had escaped him.

"I say, Hiram," suggested Bruce the next morning, "can't you take me on a little trip this morning? We've got nothing much to do to-day except wait for to-morrow."

"Where do you want to go?" inquired the pilot of the *Scout*.

"Oh, west—in fact, well, Hiram, I'd like to go to Wayville."

"Hum! same old idea about those diamonds still in your mind; eh?" asked Hiram.

"See here," replied Bruce eagerly, "I've got good reason to believe that the trip is worth making. You'll see when we get to Wayville. I'd like to have you land right where that diamond robber left the *Scout* and show me as near as you can the route he took."

"All right," assented Hiram. "You won't rest until you get there, I suppose."

The *Scout* made a fast trip to Wayville. It was at the same hilly spot where Hiram had parted with his uncomfortable passenger that eventful night that he brought the machine to anchor.

"Here we are," he announced and he proceeded to describe as best he could the movements of the the fugitive after he had left the *Scout*. "That nearest thicket over yonder is the one he dove into first."

"Come with me, Hiram," invited his comrade eagerly. "You are sure he went through that thicket? "We'll go, too. Do you see that?" he inquired, as half-way through the densely wooded space they came to an old hut.

"What about it?" asked Hiram.

"Well, that was a favorite hiding place for that man Wertz I've told you about, when he wanted to keep out of the way of people hunting for him

to call him to account for some of his misdeeds," explained Bruce. "How well I remember it! Ever since you described the spot, I have wondered if the diamond thief, who was just such a character as Wertz was, didn't know about it, maybe visited it in trying to escape."

"Why," observed Hiram as they came to the front of the rude structure, "that padlock on the door looks rusty enough to have been untouched for ages."

Bruce tried the door, but nothing less than a crowbar would budge it."

"Aha!" he ejaculated suddenly, "look—the cellar window."

"Smashed in—I see," spoke Hiram.

"One pane of glass, yes," proceeded Bruce excitedly. "And look, too, stains of blood on the fragments of glass and the window frame. Oh, say, I know! There's a cistern right under that window. I remember it perfectly and—Hiram, help knock out the rest of the window. I'm going to get into the house that way."

"And drop into a cistern!" railed Hiram.

"It's an old leaky one and was dry as a bone, I remember, when I was here with Wertz."

They smashed out the window frame with a piece of plank they found near by. Bruce let himself

cautiously backwards through the aperture. Hanging by both hands, he let go.

"It's all right," his voice sounded, hollowly. "Throw me down some matches."

Hiram awaited the next developments with some impatience, and considerable curiosity. Then he saw a hand grasp the inside window frame, then another, and he tugged at the shoulders of his struggling comrade and pulled him up into daylight.

"For gracious sake, where have you been? In some dirty hole, I do declare!" cried Hiram.

"It was dirty, but I don't care about that," panted the other youth. "Ouch!" and he proceeded to rub some dirt out of his left eye.

"Shall I help you?" questioned Hiram, anxiously.

"No, it's out now," was the answer.

"Good."

Bruce was covered with dust and cobwebs. He scrambled to his feet breathless, but his eyes were fairly snapping from some intense excitement.

"Where's your cap?" asked Hiram, noticing that his friend was bareheaded.

"Oh, that's all safe,—and everything else!" cried Bruce, and he unbuttoned his coat and revealed his cap all wadded up. "Just look at that!" he shouted and he opened the cap. Within it rested a great

heap of jewelry, blazing with crystal sparks of radiance.

"The diamonds!" gasped the astounded Hiram.

"I guess so!" answered Bruce. "The bargain with the jeweler was five thousand dollars' reward. As my partner, Hiram Dobbs, I shall have the pleasure of handing you over just half of it,—two thousand five hundred dollars!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE FALSE BAROGRAPH

"He's a wizard, but——"

The speaker, one of many gathered near the grand stand of the International grounds, paused in the middle of the sentence, and looked significantly at his companion.

"I understand," agreed the latter. "You want to say that the fellow Valdec is an aviatic contortionist. Whew! there's a risky turn. And he's bobbed up all right. There's not much practicability or science in the stunt, though."

The *Whirlwind* had gone up third in the last big event of the meet. Valdec had completely overshadowed his previous contestants. There was no doubt as to his agility, daring and complete mastery of his machine at critical junctures. He suggested reckless bravado, and acted like a man not caring one whit for life or limb.

"He's hair-raising and blood-curdling, and that is all," declared Hiram. "But——"

"There's his big stunt—looping the loop!" cried the thrilled and really interested Bruce.

There could not help but be vociferous applause as a result of the marvellous gyrations of Valdec. He was showing off his strongest points. To the lover of sensations they were fascinating. To the real, progressive airman, however, they showed little in the way of grace or real utility.

For all that, the ever observant Hiram looked sober and anxious as Valdec brought the *Whirlwind* to center field, and was greeted with a real ovation. Dave next received the signal to begin, and the *Ariel* arose in the air.

"I'm tingling all over!" declared Hiram.

"Keep your nerves steady," advised Mr. Brackett, at his side. "Dave will, I am sure."

"Pretty work, that," pronounced a bystander, and the staring, gaping Hiram echoed the sentiment enthusiastically.

The *Whirlwind* had been a mad, erratic, dashing creature full of strange turns and jerky movements. Valdec had looped the loop twice, but it was with a dive, rather than a swoop. The *Ariel* proceeded on its course with a gliding movement until about eight hundred feet up in the air. Then the pilot began a spiral. The crowd watched the maneuver breathlessly. There was not a break in the swift, perfect circles, narrowing to a space not three times the length of the biplane.

"Pretty neat, that!" sang out an admiring voice.

"One—two—three" added a strident echo—"he's discounted the record!"

Three times in succession, far up aloft, the *Ariel* had turned a complete loop-the-loop somersault. So graceful, so easy it seemed to the expert young aviator, that the maneuver was a pleasant contrast to the rapid rush work of the venturesome Valdec.

A roar of commendation arose from the spectators. Not yet, however, had Dave Dashaway won his full laurels. The *Ariel* sailed away from its recent field of action straightaway west. Then, five hundred feet up in the air, within the full view of every person on the ground, distinctly the *Ariel* began "writing."

"A-R-I-E-L"—in small letter script; every curve and letter formation could be traced.

The watching crowd went wild with delight. As the *Ariel* descended gracefully to the ground, even the Syndicate crowd themselves knew that the day had gone against them. The judges were of one voice. The official blackboard gave to number five thirty additional points.

"Ten points shy—oh, dear!" lamented Hiram.

"Mr. Dashawhay has shown his mettle all the same," proclaimed Bruce proudly.

"There's nothing open for the *Ariel* class tomorrow, the last day," observed Hiram. "I sup-

pose the committee will give out the official award of the big prize this evening."

"Oh, Hiram! Hiram!" shouted Bruce three hours later, bursting into the hangar where his comrade was writing a letter to some home friends. "You're to come down to headquarters right away."

"That so? Who says it?" challenged Hiram in his usual offhand way.

"Mr. Brackett. And Dave. Something's up. A row, I think."

"A row? Why? what about?" questioned Hiram, fully interested now.

"About the awards. I don't know—I just guess. I know this much, for Dave Dashaway told me that. The committee of awards wants all our people, and the Syndicate folks."

"I'm such a small potato I can't see why they include me," observed Hiram. "Unless—thunder! if it's about——"

"That barograph" he was about to add, but he suppressed the utterance. All the way to the club building, however, there was an excited flush on his cheeks, and he was thinking hard and hopefully.

"*Ariel?* You're to go in," spoke the guard at the door of the committee room—and the boys entered. Hiram was last. He paused for a moment as he passed a man seated somewhat back in the

shadow. In an instant he recognized the disguised man of the restaurant.

"Mr. Borden!" he spoke in a whisper. Then he passed on. The tramp artist had placed a warning finger to his lips.

Mr. Brackett and Dave sat slightly back of a table around which were gathered the five official committeemen. Opposite to them were Worthington, Valdec and two others of their crowd. The chairman of the committee took up a bundle of papers and arose to his feet.

"All those interested in the matter under consideration are here, I believe," he observed. "Mr. Worthington," he continued, "we have to announce a revision of the unofficial announcement of prizes won."

"How is that? What do you mean?" flared up the fiery Valdec.

"Just this," replied the chairman steadily, almost sternly. "The committee has awarded the altitude test to number five."

"Why! see here!" shouted the choleric Valdec, springing to his feet. "The barograph test"—but the chairman silenced him with a dignified wave of his hand and went on:

"You are barred from the grounds hereafter and the Association will be notified. You can take your choice with your entrant, Mr. Worthington:

a public exposure, or a quiet withdrawal from membership in and privileges of the National Aero Association."

"I cannot understand," stammered Worthington, uneasily.

"This gentleman will explain," observed the chairman and Borden advanced from the shadows, minus his disguise.

It was a brief but conclusive story—that which the artist tramp recited. He charged the Syndicate people with conspiring to defeat the high aims of aviatics. He claimed that Valdec had never made the altitude flight and had substituted a "doctored" barograph for the one the officers supplied to him at the start of the contest.

"The man you employed to provide the fraudulent instrument has been brought to us by Mr. Borden," proceeded the chairman. "His private mark was on the barograph and the one removed is in our possession, secured secretly by Mr. Borden at your hangar."

Dismay, exposure, defeat!—like some snarling animal Valdec left the room. Humiliated and degraded Worthington sneaked after him.

"You are credited with forty new points, Mr. Dashaway," announced the chairman of the committee, giving you a winning lead. The committee

has decided to award you the ten thousand dollar prize."

The grand event was over, the victor crowned, and Dave Dashaway stood champion in his line, eager for new laurels.

It all came to him pleasantly as he started the *Ariel* homeward for the International grounds after a brief pleasure flight.

The incidents of the past two days had been most enjoyable. The Interstate Aero Company had won approved recognition of their output, and their machine had been driven by the top-notch artist in the aviation field.

The result of the discovery of the diamonds had made Bruce Beresford supremely happy. He could now provide permanently for his little sister, Lois, and he could afford to wait till the next season to rejoin his young friends in their airship experiences. His ears healed so that only a scar showed.

The diamond thief had undoubtedly smashed the window of the old hut at Wayville to throw his plunder into an obscure hiding place. The jeweler was faithful as to the payment of the promised reward. Then, when the business of the meet was over Dave had gone on a little trip of his own.

The young aviator was about fifteen miles from his destination, when a swift biplane he had noticed

casually, crossed for the second time in front of him and made a sudden flight aloft. Then it swung around, followed the same course the *Ariel* was pursuing and, putting on full speed, got directly above him.

"That's a queer maneuver," observed Dave, and the words had scarcely left his lips when there shot down a dark object with a sputtering sparkling spot of fire in its center. It struck the tail of the *Ariel,* rebounded, descended perhaps a hundred feet and exploded in mid air.

"Meant for me!" cried Dave, "but why? Who is this new enemy——"

A yell fell upon the ears of the astonished pilot of the *Ariel.* It proceeded from above. Dave ventured one glance overhead. He was truly startled.

The rival biplane was in flames. The pilot had given the wheel a wrench, and as the machine went hurtling down, not thirty feet above the *Ariel,* he tore himself from his seat and jumped.

Like a shot he struck the *Ariel* cockpit rail, and, helpless, crippled, and apparently insensible, began to slip across the wings. Dave reached for him and pulled him into the machine.

"Just in time!" he breathed, his mind in a tumult.

Only by a dexterous movement did Dave save the aeroplane from capsizing for his momentary inattention to the wheel and the shock of the falling body

had nearly wrecked the machine. His involuntary passenger did not move. The other biplane fell earthwards all aflame.

Dave had no idea as to the identity of his baffled enemy, whom he decided must have been hurt by striking the metal edge of the cockpit. He made for the International grounds and landed directly in font of the *Ariel* hangar.

"Help me get a man out," he directed Hiram, who stood awaiting the descent.

"What's up now, Dave?" inquired his assistant, leaning over and looking into the cockpit. "Why, say—it's Vernon!"

Dave was greatly startled. Into his mind flashed the truth. Filled with malice and revenge because he had lost a probably rich reward for putting through his infamous plottings, Vernon had essayed a final attack upon the young aviator.

"He tried to destroy the *Ariel*," said Dave, "but he seems hurt. "Phone for an ambulance, Hiram."

Vernon was, indeed, hurt. Both of his arms were broken at the wrists. He would never drive an airship again.

Good came of Dave's care for him, miscreant as he was. The old accomplices of Vernon abandoned him in his wretched plight, but Dave saw that he was given the best of care at a hospital.

Vernon broke down under this kind treatment.

He not only confessed his share in the plots of the Syndicate, but betrayed the secrets of old Martin Dawson.

Not much of the Beresford fortune was wrested from that schemer, but at least Bruce Beresford had the satisfaction of so working out affairs that Dawson could no longer interfere with him or his little sister, Lois.

"You are a credit to your friends," proclaimed Mr. Brackett, as he handed Dave Dashaway the ten thousand dollar check that represented the first grand prize of the International meet.

"And what lots of them he's got!" cried Hiram Dodds.

"I hope I'm somewhere on the list," modestly intimated Bruce Beresford.

"Be sure of that," was the hearty reply. "So much so, that, when we start in for new triumphs, next season, I hope to enroll you as one of the crew of the *Ariel*," said Dave.

"Fine!" cried Bruce. "That would suit me down to the ground—to become an airman like you, Mr. Dashaway."

"You can't become an airman like Dave," broke in Hiram, loyally. "There isn't a man that flies who can come up to him. He's the champion, and in a class by himself."

"And that's the truth," added Mr. Brackett. "There is only one Dave Dashaway."

"Then I propose three cheers for him!" cried Bruce.

"Whoop! Hurray! That's the talk!" burst out Hiram. And then the cheers were given with vigor, and a "tiger" was added.

And here let us say good-bye to Dave Dashaway, Air Champion.

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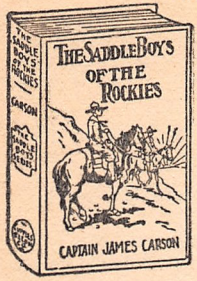

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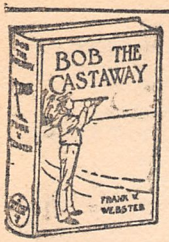

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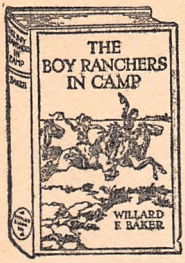

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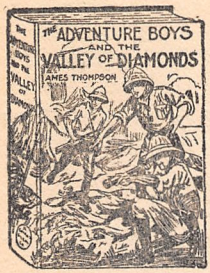

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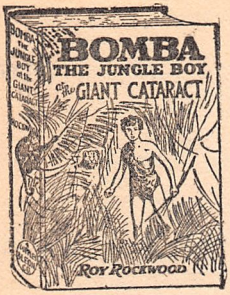

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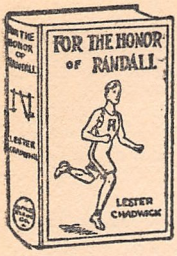

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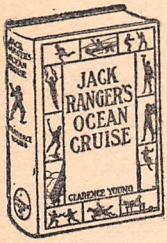

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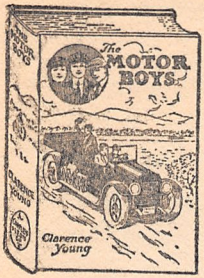

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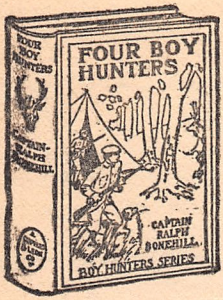

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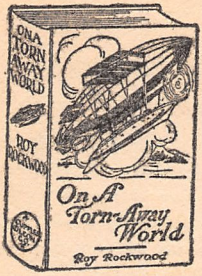

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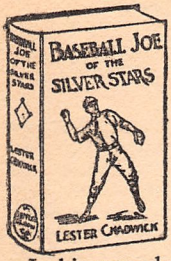

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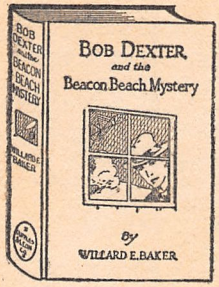

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